Mary’s Reach

A PHOTO DOCUMENTARY
by Sarah Ann Jump
Mary’s Place
Refugee Outreach

Founded in January of 2009, Mary’s Place has grown from a coat distribution to an all-encompassing refugee outreach center. Kathy LaBue, founder and director, has watched the center grow from concept to community. The closing of two community churches left LaBue, among others, in need of a new form of outreach. “The heartache coming from those closings said to us that in order to form a new community, we had to get outside of ourselves,” she recalls. “At the time, we could see [the refugees] walking up and down Dewey Avenue wrapped in sheets and wearing flip-flops in the middle of the winter.” The group collected coats and boots, and stored them in the first few rooms of the Holy Rosary rectory. “We determined that there were so many in need but they couldn’t convey to us what they needed,” LaBue remembers. “From this basis of boots and coats sprang the tutoring program, the emergency clothing program and the food program.”

As the reach of the center grew, so did the community within it. Refugees would bring new families to Mary’s Place the morning after they settled into their new American homes. The center now works with 300 to 500 families per year, on a rotating basis. Mary’s Place will provided them with clothes and food, toys for their children and help them learn English. They also offer case management services that help refugees with everything from green cards to reading letters to enrolling their children in school. Most importantly, Mary’s Place offers a neutral community environment; free from the conflict the refugees have fled. “I love family,” LaBue said, “and Mary’s Place is literally run like a big family.”
Pae Mu and To Ha Hsa, refugees from Burma, wait among other clients to have their files reviewed by a case worker at Mary’s Place. Hsa’s daughter is currently in 10th grade at a local high school and dreams of going to college.
Mary’s Place is able to provide for so many families through the donations of time, money, food, clothes and toys. “They let us help the people,” said Kathy LaBue, director. “Without free-will donations, we wouldn’t be here and able to operate.” Refugees are encouraged to take what they need to feed and clothe their families. Monetary donations allow for the purchase of food and planning special programs for the children.
“It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.”

-Mother Teresa
“When the refugees come [to Mary’s Place] they are totally immersed in English,” said Kathy LaBue, director, “and this appears to be a very effective way of doing things.” Salmone Kasinge, a refugee from Zambia, remembers being scared the first time she came to Mary’s Place because she did not know any English. At the time she was eleven years old, but like most children, she picked up English quickly. Learning a new language proves more difficult for adults. Mary’s Place offers formal English as a second language classes, taught by volunteers, to lessen the language barrier.
ref·u·gee
/ˌrefyoʊˈdʒi/  
Noun  
A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.
“I have been a volunteer at Mary’s Place since September 2009. I consider Mary’s Place to be my home away from home, and I feel as if everyone there is part of my family. I keep returning because I love the people, and when I am there, I am whole, I am rejuvenated.

Mary’s Place has forever changed me.

When I first began to go there, I was still really searching for who I was and what made me happy. My time there, and the friendships I have formed, has allowed me to discover who I am, and how to be comfortable in my own skin. When I am there, I am truly “me” in the purest form. I have taken on the roles of mother, sister, and friend.”

Glynis Jones
“To me, Mary’s Place means love and friendship. Everything. They have everything; like teaching me English, giving my family clothes and food, helping with homework. Mary’s Place brings everyone together. It’s a great place to be.”

Salome Kasinge
14-year-old refugee from Zambia
I walked into Mary’s Place a photographer.
I left inspired.

Ever since then, I have returned as a volunteer with a camera. I have formed friendships, gained trust, and captured moments.

Mary’s Place is based on donations and run by volunteers. They are always in need of more.
1.4 million people have become refugees outside of their own countries