

Bridges of Faith

ORAM- Communities of Faith Concept Paper: Assisting and Integrating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex (LGBTI) Asylees, Resettled Refugees & Asylum Seekers

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in. (Matthew 25:35)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) refugees, asylum seekers and asylees are among the most vulnerable people in the world today. The few who make it to safety face extraordinary survival challenges. Many have escaped their own families and communities or origin and are utterly isolated. Communities of faith can offer these refugees a new start and a reason to keep living.

ORAM – Organization for Refuge, Asylum & Migration, is the leading organization worldwide advocating for LGBTI refugees. Faith based communities are uniquely capable of embracing and assisting LGBTI refugees – communally and theologically. Welcoming denominations have joined forces with ORAM in a unique and profound partnership to give these refugees the support and shelter they need for a real chance to start their lives anew in North America.

This initiative will strengthen congregations as they stand at the forefront of social change and provide vital support to LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers and asylees.

Through *Bridges of Faith*, dozens of LGBTI individuals fleeing persecution will begin to lead healthy, stable lives in welcoming communities across North America. The project will become a model for other faith and community groups to undertake similar life-saving work for LGBTI people escaping homophobic persecution.

Program description

Faith groups and ORAM will work closely to compassionately deliver unparalleled assistance to LGBTI resettled refugees, asylum seekers and asylees. ORAM will identify, assess and refer appropriate refugees, and will train national coordinators and congregational leaders in the needs of these refugees and how to fill them. Congregations can call on congregants to organize into *Guardian Groups* - a formal group of individuals responsible for assisting an LGBTI refugee or asylee under the guidance of the congregational leaders, to care and guide these refugees in their journey to true security and safety.



Nationwide, congregants will derive strength, vitality and spiritual growth from their participation in these Guardian Groups, through their commitment to the LGBTI refugees they assist, to one another and to their congregations. They will save human lives and will rescue LGBTI refugees from isolation and despair.

LGBTI Refugee and Asylee Training

ORAM will provide a series of tailored trainings to faith leaders on the resettlement needs of LGBTI refugees and asylees. Trained and willing congregations can then elect to form Guardian Groups. The trainings will include the following topics:

- Essential asylum and refugee resettlement law and processes
- Connecting with a refugee through a voluntary resettlement agency (VOLAG)
- Cross cultural sensitivity
- Finding and maintaining secure housing
- Essential services (i.e., physical and mental health care)
- Ecumenical and legal ethical obligations and
- Maintaining personal boundaries.

The trainings will be based on ORAM's publication: [Rainbow Bridges](#).

Connecting with an LGBTI Refugee or Asylee

Participating congregations will be presented a potential refugee and asylee by ORAM. ORAM will determine the refugee's eligibility, bona fides and legal claim while congregations will determine the right fit for their community. Some potential refugees and asylees may already be involved in congregations in their country of origin or passage. With an extensive network of support agencies, ORAM will help participating congregations get started with the program.



Eligible clients can include:

- A recognized refugee who has been approved to travel to the US or Canada within 90 days;
- An asylee approved during the past 30 days; or
- An individual with a particularly strong pending asylum application. (Priority will be given to affirmative applicants who arrived in the country during the previous 90 days and are not in deportation proceedings.

Only those without criminal records will be considered.

Supporting the LGBTI Refugee and Asylee

After training and connecting with an eligible LGBTI refugee or asylee, the congregations will provide vital assistance in a number

of areas. These include helping the refugee locate suitable housing, access available government benefits, find work or vocational training, navigate North American cultural rules, , manage personal finances, learn English (or French in a francophone area), apply to educational institutions and maintain sound physical and mental health. Congregations will assist refugees for at least one year, providing an essential and stable community and a spiritual home for those clients who desire it.

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Excluded from the communities that form the social safety net for most new arrivals in North America, LGBTI resettled refugees, asylum seekers and asylees struggle to find their way through a maze of employment, medical, housing and social service systems. Many are missing a critical ingredient to succeed in resettlement: emotional and spiritual motivation. The initiative creates a path for these refugees fleeing homophobic persecution to integrate into accepting communities. They will assist the refugees in addition to helping secure benefits which the government has set aside to assure their integration in their new home.

Institutions of faith are uniquely positioned to provide support for LGBTI refugees because they are committed to doing good unto others. Their fellowship and dedication often transcends racial, cultural, economic, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other boundaries. Faith-based organizations also serve as a crucial resource to refugees seeking social integration.

Meaningful impact

Successfully resettling an LGBTI refugee truly takes a community capable of supporting the body and the spirit. Through this innovative partnership with ORAM, committed congregations will tangibly improve the lives of those who escaped violence abroad. Working with ORAM, congregations will help refugees, asylum seekers and asylees build bridges to freedom, as they fortify their devotion by welcoming the stranger.