

Roanoke Refugee Mental Health Council Members

Bhutanese Organization of Roanoke
Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare
Family Service of Roanoke Valley
Commonwealth Catholic Charities
Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
LewisGale Regional Hospital – Respond
Mental Health America of Roanoke Valley
New Horizons Healthcare
Roanoke City Health Department
Virginia Department of Health

Mental Health Referral Agencies

Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare
Carilion Psychiatry
Family Service of Roanoke Valley
LewisGale Regional Hospital - Respond
Mental Health America of Roanoke Valley
Roanoke Health Department

ROANOKE REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE



Our Vision: Every refugee's basic needs, i.e. food, shelter, clothing, physical and mental health, are met now, here in Roanoke.

Our Mission: Provide advocacy for and guidance to the refugee community and service providers in order to access/obtain culturally appropriate mental health services.

Our Values: We value the dignity of all individuals involved in the process, both receiving and providing services, by meeting people where they are, and offering support to help them reach their goals and full potential. We promote respect, dignity, acceptance, and hope.

Who are we?

The Roanoke Refugee Mental Health Initiative was launched in January 2014 with primary goal of establishing a self-sustaining healing and wellness structure through the collaboration of local agencies and interested individuals. Supported by Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, this initiative has two components: The refugee mental health council that oversees the initiative, and the refugee referral system - an organized group of providers where refugees with mental health issues can access care.

Who is a refugee? What makes a refugee different from an immigrant?

The United Nations defines a refugee as “ someone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” On the other hand, an immigrant is defined by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services as “an alien admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident.” Unlike immigrants, who left their homes with much preparation and goodbyes, refugees didn’t have time to prepare – they merely wanted to escape and save their lives, leaving everything behind. Unlike immigrants who intentionally choose to live in America, refugees simply went to the next country for safety, and by luck were approved for 3rd country relocation to the United States. Unlike immigrants who can return at will, refugees may not be able to safely return to their homeland. Unlike many immigrants who learned English and American culture prior to relocation, many refugees came with little to limited English proficiency and very

little clue about real life in the United States. Unlike immigrants who lived life under normal circumstances, refugees lived with scars of trauma from war, massacre, death of love one, violence, rape, persecution, and more. Therefore, refugees need more support to get established than immigrants.

How can you help?

The needs of refugees, especially the newcomers, are varied. In many communities, volunteers help in setting up the apartment before the refugees arrive, teach or assist in the the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, drive refugees to appointments such as in doctor’s clinics, job interviews, social security office, and the like. Many refugees need support in various aspect of their resettlement.

Volunteers are also needed to help in various group projects including: livelihood program for women and elderly, community mental health awareness session, suicide prevention training, art therapy, and much more.

If you are interested to help, contact:

Commonwealth Catholic Charities
820 Campbell Avenue SW, Roanoke 24016
Telephone: 540-342-7561

On culture and diversity

The United States is a melting pot of all races. There is no typical American because there are no definite physical characteristics that will easily identify what an American looks like. Many refugees and immigrants have become American citizens, but they have continued to practice their culture and traditions. This continued addition of culture – language, food, songs, dances, way of dressing, religious practices, alternative medicine, etc creates a diversity that stirs local communities to evolve and improve.