



MOHAWK VALLEY RESOURCE CENTER FOR REFUGEES
many cultures, one community.

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The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees Volunteer and Internship Handbook

The History of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees

Utica is a City of Migration. For over 200 years, Utica, New York, a city of 60,000 has attracted immigrants and refugees. The immigrant communities that had settled in the city included Italian, Irish, German, Polish, and Arab populations. In 1910, the foreign born population of Utica constituted 28.6% of the city's population, but by 1990 it had declined to 5.4%. Utica experienced a sharp population decline from 100,410 in 1960 to 60,651 in 2000.

Since opening in 1981, the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR) has resettled over 15,000 individuals, helping to re-stabilize the population and reverse a half-century of continuous population decline. By 2010 the population had increased to 62,235.

This phenomenon has been the subject of numerous national and international news articles and has resulted in Oneida County having one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the U.S. The City of Utica now has a foreign born population of 17.6% with a quarter of the population (26.6%) speaking a language other than English at home (US Census).

For 35 years MVRRCR has been an independent affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugees Service (LIRS), one of 10 national voluntary agencies (large non-profit social service organizations that support refugee resettlement programs and work directly with the federal government).

The Founding Executive Director

The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees grew out of the inspiration of Roberta Douglas, whose concern for Amerasian children led her to work with refugees. Her efforts began with the resettlement of a single Vietnamese man through Catholic Charities in Syracuse.

With the assistance of Roberta's husband, a group of local clergy, the Superintendent of Utica Schools, the Oneida County Executive, and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the Center was officially established in 1979 and incorporated in 1981 with Roberta Douglas as the first Executive Director.

Since its inception the Center has assisted refugees from more than 34 countries, including Bhutan, Bosnia, Burma, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Russia and the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Sudan, Somalia and others.

The Next Phase: Welcoming Vietnamese and Russians in the 80's

In 1983, Rose Marie Battisti became the Executive Director. The Resource Center for Refugees grew and prospered during her 10-year term. Refugee placement numbers continually increased with the arrival of many Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese and Polish refugees. By 1993, the refugee arrivals had increased to 370 per year.

A major accomplishment for Ms. Battisti and the Resource Center for Refugees was the establishment of the Welcome Home House, a part of the Amerasian Residential Program (ARP). The Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1990 allowed outcast children fathered by American soldiers during the Vietnam War the right to come to their fathers' homeland.

The concept of ARP was to eliminate the 6-month stop for Amerasians at the Philippines Processing Center before entry into the U.S. Groups of 75 young people were brought to Utica every three months, beginning in July of 1991 and ending in October 1992.

Housed in the former Dixhurst Building at the Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center on Court Street, they were taught English as a Second Language (ESL), vocational skills and cultural orientation to American life. At the end of this training period, they were relocated to one of five centers around the country.

The third large wave of refugees began in 1988 with the arrival of the first families from the former Soviet Union. These refugees were mostly Pentecostal Russians who came to escape religious persecution. At the close of 1996, the Russians were the largest group ever resettled, numbering close to 1,400.

The 1990's: Welcoming the Bosnian Community

Richard P. Sessler became the Executive Director in 1993 when Rose Marie left the position to assume the directorship of the Welcome House Social Services for the Pearl S. Buck Foundation. Sessler, a retired Air Force officer, had served the Refugee Resource Center as Assistant Director for three years. He brought sound management and diplomatic skills to the position. Under his direction the Center expanded to serve the fourth major population influx when Congress voted to include Bosnian refugees in the U.S. refugee allotment. In the first year of the program, the Resource Center for Refugees relocated 79 Bosnians.

In 1997 the agency resettled 1,145 Bosnians, the largest number of individuals ever resettled by MVRRCR in one year. By 2006 when the last Bosnian arrived under refugee status MVRRCR had assisted just over 4,500 individuals from the former Yugoslavia. Individuals from Bosnia can no longer come to the U.S. under refugee status; however, many continue to arrive to the Utica area as immigrants through family reunification and marriage.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 drastically impacted refugee resettlement to the U.S. The number of resettled refugees declined from an average of 70,000 annually before 2001 to 28,000 in 2003. The impact on the Resource Center for Refugees was substantial. In 2003, the Center resettled only 256 refugees (having resettled 577 in 2001).

The 2000's: Responding to a Changing World

In 2002, Mr. Sessler retired and Peter D. Vogelaar became the Executive Director. Mr. Vogelaar lived and worked in the Middle East for much of his life. Before coming to the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees he served with the Reformed, Lutheran, and Presbyterian Churches as Director of the Joint Relief Ministry for refugees at St. Andrew's United Church in Cairo.

In 2003 the Board of Directors instituted a formal strategic planning process to analyze the ongoing activities of the Center, consider new directions, and propose revisions to the Center's mission. Two strategic directions were proposed, each building on the strengths of the Center's experience and position in the community:

- Strengthen and solidify the Center's existing resettlement programs for refugees.

- Enhance programs for non-refugee immigrants and position the center as acultural broker to the community.

Over the next 8 years, following these strategic directions, Mr. Vogelaar expanded the services of the Refugee Center to include immigration, citizenship, interpretation, translation, and cultural competency services.

The new strategic directions of the Center reflected the presence and needs of the growing refugee and non-refugee immigrants in the community. MVRRCR focused on enabling individuals and communities to promote and sustain their cultural identity, and increasing access to medical assistance and culturally and linguistically appropriate services to Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals within the community. Through this process the Compass Interpreters division of MVRRCR was born. For more information visit www.compassinterpreters.org

In 2012 Peter Vogelaar left his position as Executive Director to continue working with displaced populations overseas, accepting a job with ICMC in Istanbul Turkey. Shelly Callahan, then Director of Programs and Services, was hired as the next Executive Director.

Continuing the Mission to Build Community with Many Cultures

Prior to being Director of Programs and Services, Shelly Callahan managed the Employment Services department at the Refugee Center. Since becoming Executive Director, Mrs. Callahan has presided over a renewed strategic planning process resulting in even greater collaboration with community partners. The Refugee Center will continue its long tradition of assisting refugees, immigrants, and those with limited English language proficiency throughout the integration process and help them achieve independence and self-sufficiency by developing products and services that enable us to build a community with many cultures.

MVRRCR attributes our success to the strength and dedication of the staff and volunteers and their passionate concern for refugees and immigrants. Equally important to our success is the warm welcome refugees and non-refugee immigrants continue to receive from Utica and the Mohawk Valley.

A Welcome and Thank You From the Desk of the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator

Dear Volunteers and Interns of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees,

A warm welcome to new volunteers and interns to MVRRCR and a BIG thank you to all past and present volunteers for your commitment to both the mission and clients of MVRRCR. Since 1981, MVRRCR has resettled over 15,000 refugees to new lives here in Utica, NY. Since the very beginning of our agency, we have relied on the kindness, assistance and tireless dedication of volunteers and interns in our day to day work. Currently as staff of just over thirty individuals, we firmly believe that volunteers and interns are the backbone of our organization - currently a group of over 200 individuals strong! Many of you are often the first individuals newly arriving refugees meet when they arrive at our center. Some of you may be refugees or former refugees, who have been resettled through our agency and choose to give your time and energy in a pay it forward manner. Whether you have been part of the team once a year or five days a week, every minute of your commitment has helped to build and support a community of welcome. So from the bottom of our hearts thank you for all that you do. Without you, we would not be able to proudly say Utica is one community, made up of many cultures.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Cieslewitz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Cieslewitz

Volunteer and Internship Bill of Rights

To volunteer or intern is give your time, talents and energy. You are a valued member of the MVRCR team, that provides quality resettlement experience and additional support services. As a volunteer or intern, you are accorded certain rights which MVRCR intends to honor. If you feel at any time that you are being denied any of these rights, please contact the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator to discuss your concerns.

1. The right to a volunteer/intern opportunity or position that is worthwhile and challenging.
2. The right to be treated as a co-worker; not simply free help.
3. The right to a volunteer/intern opportunity or position that fits your time and talents
4. The right to know as much about the refugee program as serves your needs
5. The right to new opportunities and a variety of experiences
6. The right to a clearly defined role
7. The right to be heard, voice concerns and to be able to make suggestions in matters that involve volunteers and planning processes
8. The right to sound guidance and direction from the appointed supervisor

Volunteer and Intern Responsibilities

Because volunteer and interns are a valued part of our team, we stress the importance of the responsibilities and expectations of volunteers and interns.

1. To make a reasonable commitment in light of your goals, needs, interests, skills and available time
2. To respect the confidentiality of refugee clients and to sign confidentiality agreement
3. To complete any required orientation and training sessions as deemed appropriate by the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator.
4. To provide all necessary information for placement purposes including an application, references and an interview.
5. To acknowledge the need for further training on a task if needed, and to participate in the training.
6. To remain flexible and understanding in regards to placement and the fast paced environment of MVRCR.
7. To respect the time of clients by making scheduled meetings and letting them know when this changes, well in advance.
8. To support the work and mission of MVRCR in the community
9. To abide by all policies set forth by the agency, found in this handbook
10. To consult with the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator or other appropriate staff when unclear about an unusual or sensitive situation.
11. To immediately report any injury of a volunteer or client to the supervising staff person or Volunteer and Intern Coordinator.
12. To advise the Volunteer and Coordinator and other relevant staff supervisors as soon as possible of any changes in the ability to continue the volunteer or internship commitment.

The MVRCR Volunteer and Intern Process

Each volunteer and intern is required to complete the Volunteer and Intern process which is made up of several steps.

1. Completion of the Volunteer or Intern Application; including signing the confidentiality,, prohibited actions, and Core Principles of Conduct regarding Sexual Exploitation policy agreements. For volunteers or interns under the age of 18, a separate statement of permission must be signed by a parent or guardian.
2. An in-person interview with the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator will then be set up at the earliest availability at MVRCR.
3. The volunteer or intern will complete an agency tour as soon as possible.

Communication with Volunteers and Interns

For the majority of regularly communication regarding volunteer opportunities, once the application and placement process has occurred, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator will add a volunteer or intern email address to a listserv, which will be used to send out current volunteer and intern opportunities. Additionally, you may receive individualized emails on occasion.

Additionally, as a volunteer or intern, individuals can also request to be added to our closed Volunteer and Intern group on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/737305486377659/> for quicker updates about opportunities as well as agency announcements. In addition, the the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator is also available by phone at 315.738.1083 ext. 134 and in person during regular business hours at MVRCR.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis

As an affiliate of LIRS, MVRRCR has a code of conduct consistent with the IASC's six core principles as stated below; any behavior inconsistent or suspected of breaching this code of conduct, will result in immediate termination of volunteer or internship opportunities as well as possible legal action.

Core Principles of a Code of Conduct

Humanitarian agencies have a duty of care to beneficiaries and a responsibility to ensure that beneficiaries are treated with dignity and respect and that certain minimum standards of behavior are observed. In order to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, the following core principles must be incorporated into agency codes of conduct:

- Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
- Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defense.
- Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
- Sexual relationships between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged since they are based in inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
- Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
- Humanitarian workers agencies are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

MVRCR Confidentiality Policy

Refugees are people who have endured the loss of their homeland, way of life and dignity. They may have suffered great tragedies with their families and been victims of persecution and torture. At MVRCR we are dedicated to protecting the anonymity and privacy of our clients. They have come to this country to rebuild their lives in keeping with their culture and individual nature. They have a right to recover their privacy and to determine when and how their stories might be shared with others.

Volunteers and Interns who work with the refugee program agree to:

1. Respect the privacy of the refugees with whom you are matched. They may not want the stories they share with you to be shared with others. Ask them what you may tell others and what they consider to be private information.
2. Safeguard the confidentiality of the refugees by not making their names, stories and personal circumstances public in any fashion without their consent. This includes the use of photographs and information in news stories for church bulletins, corporate newsletters and local newspapers. Many refugees are happy to share their story in the media, but be sure to ask them first.
3. Hold in strict confidence any information of a sensitive nature shared by the case manager.
4. Be cognizent of any confidential information that includes any personal information such as social security numbers, and ensure that any workspace or databases in which this information can be accessed are kept safe within offices and workspaces.

Prohibited Activities by MVRCR Volunteers and Interns

MVRCR has a policy prohibiting certain activities as MVRCR volunteers and interns; both within agency and as MVRCR representatives out in the community, while utilizing the MVRCR name or position. Please review the following prohibited activities and you will be expected to sign an agreement acknowledging your knowledge of prohibitions.

The Following Activities are prohibited as MVRCR Volunteers and Interns

- Unauthorized research using MVRCR clients or data without the formal Research Proposal and consent and approval by the Volunteer/Intern Coordinator as well as the Executive Director.
- Religious Prostelytization- including on site at MVRCR and in any situation, in which you are acting as an MVRCR Volunteer, Intern or agency representative or were placed in the opportunity by MVRCR, including but not limited to; teaching English as a Second Language or other tutoring sessions utilizing religious texts or religious content as the teaching topic.
- The possession or viewing of illegal or pornographic materials on agency computers or within the agency's facility.

- Unauthorized public presentations or request for public support, or in-kind or monetary donation solicitation in which the signee claims to be a representative of MVRCR, or speaking on behalf of clients' experiences or needs without the previous consent of an MVRCR staff member.
- Media interviews on any topic based around MVRCR, its programs or its clients, either off site or at MVRCR without the previous consent of an MVRCR Staff member.
- Assistance with the completion of Immigration or Naturalization/Citizenship related paperwork or advice other than test preparation; Please see "Immigration and Citizenship" in your Volunteer and Intern handbook for more details.
- Using "The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees" name in client advocacy or mentorship, with other human services agencies or organizations without previous authorization and continual updates with the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator regarding the client's case.
- Transportation of clients, in agency vehicles or personal vehicles without the proper licensure, proof of insurance or while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Transportation of any children of child restraint age, without the proper installation and use of the appropriate child restraint/car seat.
- Any breach of the "Inter-Agency Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis" signed by the volunteer or intern.
- Any breach of the MVRCR Confidentiality Policy signed by the Volunteer or Intern.

Failure to comply with this agreement and all of its prohibitions, will result in the removal from the volunteer/intern's work with and at MVRCR, removal from the MVRCR building as well as possible legal action and mandated reporting. Any other activities deemed by MVRCR's discretion as unethical or prohibited, not mentioned here, may result in similar actions.

MVRCR Office Protocol and Expectations

As a MVRCR Volunteer and Intern, please keep in mind various protocols and expectations.

- Dress code: While there is no mandatory dress code for Volunteers and Interns, please keep in mind that MVRCR is a place of business and clothing and dress should be considered appropriate for a business casual setting, if working administratively and regularly in the building. For volunteer/intern jobs and opportunities involving heavy lifting; casual, comfortable clothing is perfectly acceptable. Also, please remember that as an agency working with clients with diverse attitudes about modesty, please consider basic modesty in your choice of clothing.
- Volunteer Sign In and Documenting of Hours: While volunteer/interning at MVRCR, volunteers and interns are required to sign in and sign out upon entering and

leaving the building at the front desk for their scheduled shifts. This helps us to track individuals in an emergency, such as a fire. We also collect hours to help us with grants and other funding sources. As a Volunteer or Intern, if you are required to complete and document a specific number of hours, you are also required to sign in, but are required to also personally keep track of our hours completed. This is not the responsibility of the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator and sign in sheets will only be used to confirm the commitment of the Volunteer or Intern, if there is any doubt or discretion.

- Clean Workspaces and Offices: In your work, please keep in mind the importance of the cleanliness of your workspaces, including but not limited to desks, surrounding floors and any area in which may be affected by your work. Please ensure that floors are swept as need, food or food packaging is placed in the garbage and if perishable in the main garbage can, near the COMPASS interpretation office. All dishes, should be immediately washed in the breakroom after use. Please consider emptying workspace trash cans whenever they are filled and need to be emptied. Any tools, supplies or work should be returned to the relevant office or staff member when finished with your work. For any questions regarding any necessary cleaning supplies or equipment, please see the Volunteer and intern Coordinator.
- Use of MVRCR Copiers and Printers: Please be mindful that as a Non Profit agency, MVRCR must practice cost effective business practices. Use of Agency copiers, printers and postage machines for any personal copying or postage needs is not allowed; educational assignments etc. In printing and copying for agency related business, when feasible, please try to conserve printer ink and paper and print double sided and in black and white or auto color when appropriate.
- Use of MVRCR Vehicles for Transporting Clients/Agency business: If you have indicated on your volunteer or internship application your willingness to help with transportation of clients or assist with agency errands, you must have a copy of your current Driver's license (expired license will not be accepted) on file with both the Volunteer Coordinator and the Finance Office. Your Driver's license must be on file with the Volunteer Coordinator when using agency vehicles you agree to follow all New York State traffic laws. All accidents and moving violations must be reported to the relevant MVRCR Volunteer Coordinator or other relevant staff member immediately. Any damage to agency vehicles must also be reported. A volunteer is covered by MVRCR's insurance in an event of an accident.

All children requiring a child restraint, must be properly restrained with the appropriate car seat at all times when transporting. For any questions with this, please see the Traffic Safety Coordinator or the Volunteer Coordinator. Failure to properly use a child restraint/ car seat when necessary, will result in loss of transportation assistance as a volunteer, and possible removal from the volunteer

program. Please ensure that all vehicles are clean after each use as well as filled with fuel.

- Use of Volunteer/Intern's Personal Vehicle for Agency Related Needs: MVRCR can reimburse mileage for volunteers and interns doing errands for agency related business. Mileage sheets are available from the Volunteer Coordinator and must be submitted by the end of the month in which they occur. MVRCR will then process mileage checks and return to the Volunteer Coordinator for distribution.
- Off Site Volunteer and Intern Opportunities and Tasks: On occasions, MVRCR Volunteers and Interns may participate in offsite events and tasks, such as apartment setups, grocery shops among other roles. Volunteers and Interns under the age of 18, may only participate on off site tasks and events under the supervision of parent or guardian. If there should be any issues that arise, please be sure to report them as soon as possible to the Volunteer Coordinator or other MVRCR Staff member in charge. Any injury that may occur, please report it to the Volunteer Coordinator as soon as possible.
- Reporting of Suspicious Behavior, Crime or Harassment: As MVRCR Volunteers and Interns, if you encounter or observe any suspicious or criminal behavior, or harassment of any sort by or targeting strangers, staff, or clients while volunteering/interning at MVRCR, please report it as soon as possible to the Volunteer Coordinator.