

WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

*Prepare by: Abhi Neupane
Advisor (OHRC, Harrisburg, PA)*

(Bhutanese Refugees, ethnic cleansing in 1990s, lived 17 to 24 years as refugees in Nepal, come from rural setting underdeveloped place, moved to extraordinarily developed countries, big problems in adaptation to new language and culture, over 80 % Hindus, rest are Christians and Buddhists, no Muslims in our community, facially we may look like Muslims but Hindus.)

How to Feel "At Home"

It takes time to feel safe and comfortable for the new comers in their new homes. But in the hard times, they might be asking themselves:

- How can I make new friends?
- How can I understand the people better?
- How can I feel at home in Pennsylvania?

I think the aim of the 'Welcoming Communities' is to help these people feel welcome and to encourage them to participate in the community.

Some immigrants come voluntarily to the US to reunite their families or to seek a better future. Others come involuntarily as refugees, forced to leave their home from war or persecution. Either way, immigrants' families are separated, their community ties cut, their social networks lost. A permanent move from one country to another is a stressful and life altering event. All newcomers begin to rebuild their life, and many succeed. But some, especially refugees, find it particularly challenging to adapt to their new community. Meeting new people and participating in the community makes it easier to "feel at home".

It would be wise to assist newcomer individuals or families to become familiar with their community and establish supportive social networks. Let's help the newcomers become a thriving member of his or her community.

Social workers and volunteers would be a great help to a newcomer to participate in social activities together, such as conversation circles, informal ESL tutoring, cooking classes, doing homework together, attending sports events, going on community tours, meeting for coffee, and attending community or cultural events.

With the support, a newcomer will feel more welcomed, improve their language skills, experience less stress and adapt more easily to their new life in any part of the US.

How can we be more welcoming and stand with our neighbors? It's always good to study the background of the immigrants and refugees. What kind of hardships they had to undergo back in their native land and while trying to come here. Their cultural set up will give you an insight in readjusting your opinion to help and welcome them into their new community. Some of the important things that can be done or not done to make Pennsylvania a Welcoming community could be highlighted as below:

In the Neighborhood and Public Places:

- Smile and say 'Hello'. If you know greeting words like 'Namaste' say it. They will open up and it helps to bridge the gap between you and the new comer.
- If they live nearby in your neighborhood; come out and talk to them.

At Schools:

- Help students at schools with their registration, English and assignments.
- Teach your kids to be good and helpful with the immigrant and refugee kids.

Cultural Exchange:

- Encourage them to participate in sporting events
- Food sharing; potluck events, mini picnics
- Conducting cultural and religious exchange events so that the population feels spiritually sound and not feel neglected

Want to help them through Volunteer hours?

- Volunteer through Catholic Charities and other organizations to help the new families their first few months of resettlement. Help could be the following type:
- Jobs for illiterate; helping them apply for jobs
- Ride for those who can't drive or don't have car
- Navigating county resources
- Helping the elderly population in ESL/Citizenship classes
- Finding good colleges and scholarships for high school graduates
- Helping the illiterate in applying for food stamps, Medicaid, Green card, state IDs,
- Helping the new comers find safe apartments
- Making hospital appointments and transporting them
- If possible meet them at the airport- greet and welcome them- they would feel like they are welcome, cared and they belong.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The world is a family)

I want to be excused to use some meaningful Hindu concepts here. Hinduism treats the world with all its people as a single family. This lofty Hindu concept tells us to live like a single family. It disregards all the man-made differences. Here is a sloka (hymn) from Upanishad:

One is a relative, the other stranger,
say the small minded.
The entire world is a family,
live the magnanimous.

Be detached,
be magnanimous,
lift up your mind, enjoy
the fruit of Brahmanic freedom.

—*Maha Upanishad 6.71–75*[7][3]

Hindus believe that the vision of holistic development and respect for all forms of life; nonviolent conflict resolution embedded in the acceptance of nonviolence both as a creed and strategy; were an extension of the ancient Indian concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Atithi Devo Bhava (*Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshavalli I.20*)

Atithidevo Bhava : 'The guest is equivalent to God' or 'Be one for whom the guest is God' is a Sanskrit verse, taken from an ancient Hindu scripture which became part of the "code of conduct" for Hindu society. It's a good concept to be internalized by all. Let's us consider them as godly or at least treat them divinely.