“All the work you guys do is foundational to the success of refugees... it changes lives.”

These are the humbling words of Henry, a Venezuelan refugee who now calls Chicago home. RefugeeOne welcomed Henry and his 28-year-old daughter, Michelle, in April 2023.

Henry, his wife, and their daughter left their home country of Venezuela in 2016, fleeing political persecution. Threats, attempted kidnappings, and an acute scarcity of resources marked their life in Venezuela before they left for Peru. Knowing they couldn’t return home or build a stable life in Peru, they applied with the UN Refugee Agency for resettlement.

Life in Peru was tough, and worsened when Henry’s wife was diagnosed with cancer. Tragically, she passed before their case for resettlement was approved.

Heartbroken by their loss, life seemed empty as Henry and Michelle continued to wait for the opportunity to build a life elsewhere.

Finally, an offering of hope: they received a call letting them know they would be resettled in Chicago.

RefugeeOne welcomed Henry and Michelle at the airport and they immediately began to rebuild their lives with the resources and support provided, including RefugeeOne’s English classes and employment program. Just one month after his arrival, Henry applied to Boombox Beverage, a specialty beverage manufacturer, and was offered a job in packaging.

The culture at Boombox emphasizes inclusivity and continuous learning. Since becoming a RefugeeOne employer partner a half year ago, they’ve hired five refugees, including one who has already risen to a supervisor position. These employees were given the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families – and in turn have become committed, growing professionals whose diverse backgrounds and perspectives better the whole team.

Meanwhile, Michelle had started a job in hospitality. She took the first job she could, as many refugees do out of necessity. It was difficult work and she found her colleagues unsupportive. After seeing her father’s enjoyment at his job, Michelle found the courage to apply at Boombox as well – and she got the position! As her English has improved, she’s taken on more responsibilities, and with time she plans to rise in the ranks. She’s excited about the learning curve.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

Michelle and Henry fled Venezuela in 2016 and RefugeeOne welcomed them to Chicago in April. The jobs we helped them find have built a strong foundation for their lives here.
and the opportunities that come with it.

Jennifer, a Boombox supervisor, speaks highly of Henry and Michelle. She sees their growth as an accomplishment for the company as well. She finds joy in the duo’s achievements, like when they bought their first car. Jennifer states, “Their accomplishments are our accomplishments.”

To Henry and Michelle, their work represents more than just a means to survive; it’s a testament to their resilience and hope for a brighter future, in honor and memory of their late wife and mother.

Henry and Michelle have enjoyed exploring what their new city has to offer on their time off. They were just introduced to a RefugeeOne volunteer mentor, so they can explore together!

Looking for your next great employee?

Henry and Michelle represent just two of hundreds of enthusiastic and capable refugees ready to work in Chicagoland. Invest in your business and create life-changing opportunities by partnering with RefugeeOne’s employment program!

- All refugees arrive fully authorized to work, and most employers who hire refugees can qualify for the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit.

- Common industries for RefugeeOne clients include manufacturing, hospitality, food service, healthcare, and retail.

- Hiring refugees adds diverse skills, backgrounds, and language abilities to your team, and also plays an important role in social integration and economic empowerment.

Visit refugeeone.org/HireARefugee to learn more and post to our job board.

Questions? Email info@refugeeone.org.
Dana has one piece of advice for others preparing to welcome a refugee family through co-sponsorship: “Go in with no expectations, except that it will be life-changing.”

Dana felt compelled after watching the news surrounding the Afghan refugee crisis, and she signed up to co-sponsor a refugee family with RefugeeOne. Co-sponsor teams play a significant role in helping newly arrived families get a strong start in the U.S. through financial and social support.

Dana gathered a group of nine to prepare the way for a family in need. They named their team “Here Comes the Sun,” a sign of hope to come.

Over the course of a few months, the team got to work. They fundraised to help cover the cost of initial rent payments for the family they’d be matched with, and gathered all the furniture and household goods needed to make an apartment a welcoming home. They completed a mentor training and reviewed our co-sponsor resource guide.

Finally, the good news came – an arrival was scheduled! The team would join RefugeeOne at O’Hare Airport in just a few short days to greet the Muhamadis, a young family of four from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

After months of anticipation, it was pure joy for the team to watch the Muhamadis step onto American soil and reunite with friends who had been previously resettled here. That day marked the beginning of a shared journey for everyone involved.

From learning how to navigate public transport to enjoying an outing to Navy Pier, the co-sponsor team has walked side-by-side with the Muhamadis in their transition to life in Chicago. This has included birthday celebrations and touring downtown skyscrapers, all part of helping the family feel comfortable in their new home.

But it’s not all about social outings, it’s the emotional support and relationships built that truly set this experience apart. Dana reflected on getting to know the Muhamadis, saying, “It didn’t feel like volunteering. It actually felt like you were walking alongside somebody.

You know you are making a difference. For me and my friends, it’s been the most impactful and meaningful way that we have ever helped.”

Dana’s co-sponsor team and the Muhamadi family have both felt enriched by their relationship and are excited for what the future holds, even now after their official 6-month mentorship has ended – they are still as close as ever. The team hopes they can help the Muhamadis down the road as their goals for life in Chicago continue to develop and change. “We want to help them just as we help our friends… we want to be there for them,” says Dana.

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**CO-SPONSORING REFUGEES: A Journey of Connection, Community, and Hope**

Co-sponsor teams offer vital support to help refugee families make a smooth transition to life in Chicago. Some co-sponsor relationships go far beyond the 6-month volunteer mark!

**MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE!**

**MAKE A HOME (OPTIONAL)**

Turn an apartment RefugeeOne secures into a home by stocking it with all the basics needed to make it a comfortable space.

**RAISE SUPPORT**

Your team will raise $6,000-$10,000 to help with initial rent payments.

**BE A FRIEND**

Visit with the family at least once a week for six months, building a relationship and helping them navigate the city and home life.

Learn more and fill out an interest form today at refugeeone.org/co-sponsor
Dear friends,

We’ve seen an incredible pace of new arrivals this summer. In the last three months, we’ve welcomed more than 250 refugees from 15 countries, plus enrolled hundreds of additional Ukrainians to receive our assistance.

As a refugee myself, I recall my own first steps in this country and how resourceful and driven one must be on the journey. I cannot emphasize enough how critical community support is in the first year of life in a new place. It makes a world of difference – whether it’s your donations to pay a newcomers’ rent or your volunteer hours helping someone learn to commute by train.

When a refugee receives their first paycheck, it’s a turning point. It represents the opportunity to provide for a family and build toward a future.

You’ll read here about Henry and Michelle’s ability to establish themselves quickly because of their tenacity and involvement in our employment program. The work of our employment team to help write resumes, prepare refugees for interviews, and conduct job trainings and hiring events successfully placed 274 newcomers in jobs last year.

We’re grateful to our 215 employment partners for opening doors of opportunity, and to supporters like you for making Chicago a city where refugees find a safe and welcoming place to work toward bright futures.

Warm regards,
Melineh Kano