

Refugee center partners with clinic to provide school supplies

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DALLAS—When the staff at the Women's Health Specialists of Dallas began planning their next office event, they wanted it to be more meaningful than a happy hour or luncheon. So, they contacted Leonid Regheta, director of the [Project:Start](#) refugee resource center.

Texas Baptists launched Project:Start more than three years ago to respond to the needs of refugees in the Vickery Meadows area of Northeast Dallas. Project:Start works with the community, churches and organizations to collect clothes, furniture and other necessities for refugees.

Women's Health Specialists of Dallas called Regheta to ask how to help, and he suggested the clinic collect school supplies for refugee children.

The staff bought backpacks in bright colors and stuffed them with pencils, pens and everything else the children would need for a successful school year.

On July 29, Women's Health Specialists opened their office to the refugee families, inviting them in for food and refreshments. They presented the backpacks to seven children in attendance, who eagerly claimed the ones with their favorite patterns.

Four parents also came to pick up backpacks for their children at home. Refugees from Burma, Rwanda and Nigeria came to receive school supplies.

Families who escaped genocide

Regheta applauded the clinic's initiative. Events like these embody the mission of Project:Start, he said.

"We build a bridge between what you guys are doing here and the people that live less than a mile away," Regheta explained.

Regheta told the doctors and nurses that many of these families waited for years in a refugee camp before they received approval to enter the United States.

Michael and his family were forced to leave their home country during the genocide in Rwanda. They waited at a refugee camp for 17 years before they were allowed to enter the United States. Now in Dallas, his family still struggles to make ends meet. The school supplies distributed to his four children will ensure that they are able to go into the school year with confidence.

Stories like Michael's are not uncommon among refugees. Regheta said the need is great, even just within the Northeast Dallas and Vickery Meadows area.

"People that live in the community... they have needs. They have a huge desire to succeed. And they are just good, solid people that want to improve their lives, considering that they are running from genocide, they're running from war, they're running from disasters of all kinds," Regheta said.

When they arrive in America, many refugees have only a suitcase or two to their name. While many resources are available to refugees, they do not know where or how to access them. Project:Start wants to bridge that gap. The resource center's office, located in the heart of Vickery Meadows, is

easily accessible to the refugees in the area.

Project:Start is a Texas Baptist ministry that receives funding through the [Mary Hill Davis Offering](#), which supports missions around the state of Texas. The 2019 offering has a statewide goal of \$3.8 million. The 2019 Week of Prayer for Texas Missions is September 8-15.