

CFNA “Friend a Family” Program

“Reaching our neighbors with Christ-inspired care”



What is the Friend a Family Program?

[Christian Friends of New Americans \(CFNA\)](#) is partnering with our local resettlement agency, the [International Institute of St. Louis](#), and St. Louis-area Lutheran congregations to welcome and support new refugee families in St. Louis, starting with Afghan refugees following their recent evacuation from Afghanistan.

The CFNA Friend a Family Program is a program that pairs families or groups of individuals (Support Groups) with a refugee family that recently arrived in St. Louis and needs help navigating their new life in America. It is the hope of CFNA and its partners that participants will build meaningful and lasting relationships with the refugee families.

What is a Support Group?

Support Groups of 5-10 individuals will work with the International Institute’s Community Support Group Program. All Support Group Members must be at least 18 years old and commit to supporting families for at least 3 or 6 months. CFNA is strongly encouraging each of its partner congregations to form at least one Support Group. Each Support Group will have a designated Support Group Representative who will be the point person for the International Institute and CFNA.

What is the time commitment for serving on a Support Group?

The International Institute gives groups the option to support a family for their first 3 or 6 months in St. Louis. The time commitment during that time period may vary, depending on the family’s size and needs, and the Support Group members’ capacity. Support Groups are expected to interact with families, at least weekly, with more frequent interactions during the first month. It will be important for Group Members to work together to delegate responsibilities, be flexible and patient, and set expectations with the family and with each other.

Although Group Member responsibilities will last 3-6 months, CFNA highly encourages people to continue to build relationships with these families. The long-term goal is a lasting relationship.

What activities will the Support Group engage in?

Support Groups will work closely with the family and the family’s caseworker to help families navigate their new lives in America. Examples of the types of activities a Support Group would engage in include:

1. Setting up the family’s home and showing them how to use household items provided by the International Institute and CFNA.
2. Helping the family understand a budget and make sure they understand their financial needs and obligations each month. This includes rent, grocery expenses, utility bills, and transportation costs.
3. Teaching the family about their neighborhood and how to get around: public transportation, grocery stores, medical clinics, school bus, bank, restaurants, and other community events that they may like to partake in.
4. Helping the family practice English.
5. Building a resume and practicing for an interview.

Support Group Members are not to engage in proselytizing. Support Group Members will be trained and provided ongoing coaching about how to share the love of Christ with these families without proselytizing.

How would Support Group Members be oriented and trained?

All people in the Support Group must attend the International Institute's orientation and training (1 hour over Zoom) followed by CFNA-specific orientation and training (1-2 hours over Zoom). Training and orientation are offered on a monthly basis. The training will include a cross cultural/cultural competency training, among other topics. Ongoing coaching and additional resources will be provided.

What are the requirements of a Support Group member?

The Support Group Representative will submit an application on behalf of the group. All members must be at least 18 years old and complete/submit paperwork, including a criminal background check and volunteer liability waiver.

For CFNA Friend a Family Support Groups, the Representative should be a member of an LCMS Church; LCMS church membership is preferred, but not mandatory, for Support Group Members.

Support Group Members are expected to show the love of Christ through their words and actions as expressed through the fruit of the Spirit, including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Support Group Members may possess many skills, but being resourceful, flexible, collaborative, and positive are preferred qualities that will make the experience fun and rewarding.

What resources will be available to the Support Groups?

Specific resources are being developed, but it is expected that the Support Group will:

- Work closely with the CFNA Friend a Family Coordinator, including regular touchpoints with the Support Group Representative, to ensure needs and resources are shared in a timely way
- Connect regularly with members of the Support Group to discuss issues and how best to coordinate and find support (e.g., through group weekly huddles, group chats, etc)
- Be in contact with the International Institute's case worker assigned to the refugee family who can help address needs that may go beyond the scope of the Support Groups
- Have access to resources to help the group navigate how best to support these families
- Learn from CFNA partners about cross-cultural ministry
- Have access to CFNA's donations of household use items, clothing, and gift cards.

What is the financial commitment of each Support Group?

The financial commitment per group is from \$500 (small family) up to \$5000 (very large family), which will be provided by CFNA through the generous donations of Lutheran congregations and the [Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis](#). All monies will be funneled through the International Institute to cover expenses for the families. Group members do not give money directly to the family. More information will be provided in the training.

How might the Friend a Family Program expand?

The Friend a Family Program is focused first on supporting new refugee families in partnership with the International Institute's Community Support Program. CFNA will continue to explore and create new opportunities to "friend" immigrant families in personal, meaningful ways. Stay tuned!

How do I sign up?

Contact your local congregation to see if a Support Group has already been formed or to form a new Support Group. When you have formed a Support Group, please register the team [here](#) and contact Christy Hoehner (choehner@cfna-stl.org), CFNA Friend a Family Coordinator. Feel free to reach out to Christy with questions.