If you wish to become a foster parent or mentor to a refugee child, or if you wish to volunteer, please contact:

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program
11 Shattuck Street
Worcester, MA 01605
phone: 774.243.3068
tax: 508.519.8310

230 Second Avenue, Suite 125
Waltham, MA 02451
URM-info@ascentria.org
ascentria.org/urm

In partnership with:
Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants
Massachusetts Department of Children and Families

Ascentria’s Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program provides foster care services for refugee and immigrant youth who:
- Fleed their homes due to war, natural disasters, violence or poverty
- Fleed persecution due to their religion, political affiliation, social group or minority ethnic background
- Were separated from parents and have no caregiver
- Experienced abuse, abandonment or neglect
- Are seeking a safe environment and hope

Since the late 1970s, the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URMP), in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF), has offered specialized foster care to unaccompanied refugee children. Ascentria’s URMP serves as an outstanding example of how refugee children can be welcomed into a receiving country’s existing child welfare framework, while adapting services to meet the special needs of foreign-born children who have experienced the trauma of forced migration.

There is an urgent need for foster parents willing to open their hearts and homes to refugee and immigrant youth. These minors are in desperate need of a long-term, stable and caring family willing to welcome them to a new home and guide them toward independence.

“My foster moms treat me like I am part of their family. They love me. I appreciate everything they do for me.”

~Melina, from Guatemala

Learn More!
@ascentriacare
@ascentria
www.ascentria.org/urm

Open your heart and home. Become a foster parent to a refugee minor.
ascentria.org/urm
Refugee Minors
Ascentria’s URMP is the only program in New England that provides foster care to refugee and immigrant children and adolescents (up to age 22) who come to the U.S. without parents or guardians to care for them.

Ascentria Helps Refugee Minors with:
- Placement with stable, loving foster families; or
- Placement in group homes, intensive foster care or residential settings where they receive all the necessary support services
- Ongoing case management, health insurance benefits, educational support, independent living skills training and more

These placements offer unaccompanied refugee minors safety and personal care within a supportive environment.

A Foster Parent’s Role Includes:
- Providing a safe, stable and supportive home environment
- Being open and willing to learn about the youth’s culture and incorporating it into your home
- Assisting the youth in planning for their future, including advocating for additional support services as needed
- Partnering with program staff, including the youth’s case worker and a family resource coordinator

Mario, from Guatemala
Mario* experienced extreme poverty and domestic violence growing up in Guatemala. When Mario was 16, he decided to leave, fearing for his safety. Alone, he embarked on the dangerous journey to the U.S., walking many miles from Guatemala before climbing on top of “the Beast,” a train that carried him to the border of Mexico. For three days he rode the train, without any food or water. When Mario arrived in the U.S., he was connected with Ascentria and placed into a loving foster home. During times of depression, Mario’s foster mom encouraged him to keep going and get his high school diploma. Mario is now attending college, pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice so that he can help others in his community. Mario said, “I believe that sharing my story helps other people because even if they face struggles in their life, I want them to know that they can do anything.”

Maria, from El Salvador
Maria’s mother left her abusive husband when Maria* was five years old. Maria went from relative to relative for five years thereafter. At the age of ten, she was on her own selling tortillas and mangoes on the street. It was then that Maria heard that she could get help from smugglers to enter the U.S. without paying upfront. With no one to fend for her, Maria reached out to the smugglers. No sooner had she crossed the border, the smugglers forced her to work for them to repay the $3,000 she owed. Maria tried to escape numerous times, but was unsuccessful. She eventually managed to contact authorities and the smugglers were arrested. She was identified as a Victim of Trafficking and became eligible to enter Ascentria’s Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program. Maria is now safe, living with her foster family. She is a freshman in high school. She receives counseling through Ascentria to help her heal from her traumatic past. She is very grateful to the U.S. and to her foster family for welcoming her into their home. Concerning her foster care experience, Maria confided, “I don’t know where I would be if it weren’t for this opportunity. I have people that care for me. I have learned a lot in school, and will be able to go to college.”

Safiya, from Eritrea
Eritrea drafts every man and woman as young as 18 into a brutal system of military service that frequently lasts many years and can amount to slave labor at state-run industrial projects. To escape, hundreds of thousands of unaccompanied minors flee, often to refugee camps across the border in Ethiopia. The camps currently house thousands of unaccompanied minors. Safiya,* the youngest of four, is one of these minors. “I saw what happened to my brothers and sister; I saw my future,” Safiya said when asked about her journey.

Ahmed, from Somalia
When Ahmed* was 11 years old, the Somali militia killed his father. At 16, the same faction attacked him on the street. He fled to a country where he had no legal protection or hope of resettlement. Ahmed was eventually granted refugee status to enter the U.S. Once matched with a foster home through the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program, Ahmed was not only able to achieve a level of safety he did not have before, but he was also able to go to school, join the school soccer team, and get a job. He soon began saving money to help care for his siblings back in Somalia.

“While their stories are true, client names and images may have been changed to protect their privacy.”

Foster Care
Adults who wish to become foster parents to an unaccompanied refugee minor must complete a background check and home study conducted by an Ascentria licensed social worker. Foster parents receive ongoing training and support from Ascentria staff and other experienced foster parents. Together, they build communities of care that give long-term support to the refugee youth in achieving mental and physical well-being, meanwhile supporting the youth’s academic and social development. Many alumni of the Ascentria URMP maintain lifelong connections with their foster families, returning to the foster home for frequent visits.

Whether in foster care, intensive foster care, group homes or residential care, Ascentria prepares the unaccompanied refugee minors for transition into independent living. These placements offer safety, individualized care and a supportive environment on the road to adulthood.

“I don’t think of them as foster parents. I think of them as mom and dad given from above. What we have is more than foster parent or foster kid, we have a family.”

~Mang, from Burma
Dear Future Foster Parent,

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a foster parent for Ascentria Care Alliance’s Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URMP). Our job is to listen, support and give strategies to help you succeed as a foster parent. We look forward to working together to achieve that goal.

Ascentria's URMP is in urgent need of loving foster homes for refugee youth and unaccompanied minors who have entered the United States prior to their 18th birthday. These youth have embarked on this journey without a parent or an appropriate caregiver to provide for them. Burma, Afghanistan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, and Central America are a few of the countries and regions from which the refugee and migrating youth have fled. In the past our foster homes have welcomed some of the "Lost Boys" from the Sudan.

Many of the unaccompanied refugee minors are victims of abuse and violence and come seeking safety, education, and a life which offers the hope of realizing their potential. The children we work with have experienced trauma, abuse and/or neglect; it is common for them to need assistance from their foster families to work through challenging behaviors and emotional difficulties. Our program provides foster families with around-the-clock support and many opportunities for training to help them in this journey. We work in partnership with you to make this experience the best it can be for both you and your foster child.

Ascentria welcomes prospective foster parents from many backgrounds and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, or sexual orientation. Prospective foster parents can be single or a couple, and don’t need to own their own home. Foster parents must be age 25 or older, must be able to pass a Massachusetts criminal record check (CORI), and must be fingerprinted.

If you can provide a caring environment for an unaccompanied refugee minor whose life, language, and cultural experiences are very different from your own, then we are eager to speak with you. Foster parents are financially reimbursed for their services. Our staff will provide the needed training and ongoing support (i.e. translators and support groups) once the youth is placed in your home.

On behalf of our refugee minors, we thank you again for your interest in becoming a foster parent!

Sincerely,

Colleen

Colleen Schroth
Recruitment and Retention Specialist
774-243-3062
cschroth@ascentria.org
Description of the Program and the Youth:

Ascentria Care Alliance’s Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (Ascentria URMP) is a contracted agency with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). It provides services, primarily through foster care, to children and adolescents who come to this country as refugees from sociopolitical conflict and oppression and who have been separated from their parents. The program began during the outpouring of Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees, and for years, served mainly Southeast Asians. Today, the population is diverse and includes Southeast Asians, Congolese, Eritreans, Somalis and Central Americans.

It is important to note that these young people are mainly boys, in their mid-teens. They need long-term commitments, since they may remain in the program until they turn 22—provided they stay in school and continue to work toward developing skills in independent living.

There are many rewards to working with this population. These young people have faced multiple losses of family, home and country. They may have been affected by the traumas of war and of their refugee experiences. Most are motivated to succeed in this country and do amazingly well in American schools, even while taught in a foreign language. Many of them may require adjustment to new educational structures. Some have lived on their own for years and need to adapt to the rules and boundaries of family life, including having someone to care for them. The task of each youth is to adapt sufficiently to this country and to survive as an adult, without losing the essence of his or her own ethnic and cultural identity. Foster parents are key in helping refugee youth face these challenges.

Steps to Becoming a Foster Parent

1. INQUIRY— Call the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program Recruitment Specialist at 774-243-3062 or email cschroth@ascentria.org to express your interest in fostering a refugee minor. You will be required to complete a phone screening. For more information, please visit us online at ascentria.org/urmp.

2. APPLICATION— After completing the phone screening, you will be given a URMP Foster Care Application. Complete the application and return it to our recruitment specialist via email, fax or mail. Your application will be assigned to a family resource coordinator who will start the verification process, and will be in touch with you.

3. BACKGROUND CHECK— Background checks (criminal, and state child welfare), reference checks (employment, personal, school, and medical) will be completed, and your home will be inspected by the family resource coordinator. Your home must meet state-mandated regulations in order to proceed with the application process.

4. TRAINING— After your application has been approved, you will attend a state-mandated training called Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP). The MAPP training highlights the many different profiles of children in the foster care system, particularly as it pertains to refugee youth. The MAPP curriculum comprehensively covers key topics such as communication techniques, trauma, sexual abuse, physical abuse, sexual orientation, discipline, and mental health.

5. HOME STUDY— Your family resource coordinator will visit with you and your household members during a series of home visits in order to get to know your family better. The home study is an opportunity to reflect upon your family’s strengths as you consider what type of youth may fit best in your home. Your family resource coordinator will be happy to accommodate your schedule. You are able to set the pace for how quickly to proceed through this important step.

6. LICENSING— After the background check, training and home study are completed, and your family is determined to be an appropriate fit for the URM program, you will officially become a licensed foster parent! Congratulations, an unaccompanied refugee minor is now ready to be added to your family!
7. MATCHING— Your family resource coordinator, along with additional professionals on the URM team, will review referrals and match the needs of a refugee minor with your family's strengths. You will receive all available information about the minor so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to move forward with placement.

8. PLACEMENT— Now the real journey begins! You will be closely supported by a team of professionals — including the youth’s case manager and your family resource coordinator — as your family adjusts to the new family member. This partnership will continue as we collectively work to empower the youth toward reaching their full potential and the ultimate goal of living an independent, healthy and fulfilling life.

What are the requirements to be a foster parent?
Any single person, married couple, or unmarried couple who understands or is willing to learn about the impact of trauma, abuse, and neglect on a child can qualify to become a foster parent. These individuals must also meet the following criteria:

- Be at least 25 years old
- Be a resident of Massachusetts
- Be a permanent resident or citizen of the U.S.
- Be a responsible, mature and healthy adult able to meet the needs of a youth
- Have a clean criminal record for the past 5 years with no history of abusing children
- Reside in a home that meets safety requirements and standards

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long does it take to become a foster parent and what is required?
There are many factors that determine how long the licensing process takes. To become a foster parent you must attend 30 hours of training and have a social worker visit your home at least 4 times to complete a home study. If your schedule is flexible, you will be able complete the training sooner and meet with the social worker more frequently, thus helping the process along. On average, it takes about 6 months to become a licensed foster parent.

What are the ages of URMs in need of care?
The majority of URMs enter the program between ages 15 and 17. They must enter the program prior to their 18th birthday in order to be eligible for our program. As with all children in Massachusetts foster care, once URM youth turn 18, they are able to sign a voluntary placement agreement and remain in care until age 22. It is rare for youth in our program to be younger than 13.

How long are URMs in foster care?
On average, foster care placements in our program last between 2 and 3 years. With support from the program and their foster families, our goal is for URM youth to reach independence. Often youth that have finished high school are ready to move out of their foster homes into college settings or their own apartment. Many of our youth develop lifelong connections with their foster families and stay in touch for years to come, returning to the foster home for frequent visits.
Will I be eligible to adopt my URM?
Unlike traditional foster children, refugee minors are generally not eligible for adoption. However, recent policy changes from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and The Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) now permits adoption of children in the URMP, under very specific circumstances.

Are URMs ever reunited with their families of origin?
If there is an opportunity for a URM to reunify with family, our program pursues that option within the best interests of the child.

What languages do URMs speak?
URMs speak a variety of different languages. Many of our youth from Eritrea speak Tigrinya, while youth from the Democratic Republic of the Congo could speak Swahili or French. Many of our youth from Central America speak Spanish, but it is also common for these youth to speak an indigenous language from their community, such as Quiche from Guatemala. All of the URM youth are learning English at different levels, and foster families must be creative in communicating with URMs when they first arrive.

Can I work full time?
Yes, many of our current foster families are working parents that juggle the responsibilities of family life. It is important that our foster families be financially secure in order to meet the needs of the foster child. It is equally important that working parents who want to foster for our program have flexible working hours in order to meet once a month with a case manager and a family resource worker.

Do I need to own my own home?
Absolutely not. The only requirement is that your residence must meet safety standards and spatial requirements.

May I choose the gender, race and age of the child I would like to foster?
You and your family resource worker will determine the best possible match for your family which includes consideration for the gender, cultural background and age of the youth.

May I foster more than one URM?
Absolutely! As long as your home meets the requirements, and we determine that you can care for multiple youth. Many URMs come with their siblings; we prefer to keep siblings groups together.

How do I pay the cost associated with caring for a URM?
The URM program contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) to reimburse you for the expenses of fostering a refugee minor. These expenses include food, clothing, household necessities, and other basic costs of having an added person in your home, such as utilities, transportation, etc. The exact rate is determined by the State and the number of calendar days the child is in your home.

Who pays for the medical/dental/vision/hearing, prescriptions and mental health services for these youth?
Young people in the custody of the State of Massachusetts receive MassHealth insurance—state provided insurance program that covers medical/dental/vision/hearing, prescriptions and mental health services.
Steps to Becoming a Foster Parent to a Refugee Minor

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