Ascentria Care Alliance
We are called to strengthen communities by empowering people to respond to life's challenges.

Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

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:
• Fled their homes due to war, natural disasters, violence or poverty
• Fled 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
ascentria.org/urm

Ascentria Services for Children and Families
A member of Ascentria Care Alliance

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. The youth can then build communities of care that give long-term support to the refugee youth in achieving mental and physical well-being, while simultaneously 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.

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.”

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.

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 mangos 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.”

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.

“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

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.

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