

VILLAGE VOICE

Help families with Acts of Kindness

They come from countries some of us might have never even heard of. They do not speak our language. They get on an airplane and travel to the United States, trusting that people here will help them make a home here in their new country.

These so called refugee families quickly become friends to countless local residents who are members of New Hope Connection, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping refugee families resettle in the western suburbs of Chicago, mainly La Grange, Brookfield and Western Springs.

Formed in 1994, New Hope Connection provides apartments, helps subsidize rent for these apartments and assists with everything from school enrollment to medical needs. They also provide clothing, furniture and food during a time when these refugee families need it the most.

"You can't help but form a very personal relationship with these people," said Deane Ruppert, president of New Hope Connection. "One of our past families even named their child after my wife. It's wonderful to see these families succeed here."

The congregations of St. John of the Cross, St. Francis Xavier, First Congregation Church of La Grange, Sisters of St. Joseph, First United Methodist Church and the Islamic Foundation in Villa Park participate in New Hope Connection. The group works directly with organizations such as World Relief and Catholic Charities to determine families who will need assistance when they arrive in the United States.

"We pick them up from the airport, and we take them directly to the Sisters of St. Joseph to stay for a few days until we can get their apartment all set up," Ruppert said. "Most of these family members do not speak English, so we must bring along translators."

Throughout the years, the group has sponsored a total of 17 families — 33 adults and 43 children. On average, it takes slightly more than four

months to get a family up and running. Although the group solicits donations of furniture, clothing and cars, the group still relies heavily on financial support raised during their annual fundraisers.

"In the past, we have held dinners and have also organized donation mailings," Ruppert said. "The amount of

money raised at these fundraisers helps us determine what exactly we can provide to these families."

This year's fundraiser to benefit New Hope Connection will feature the popular group Acts of Kindness

Cabaret, who will perform at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 26, at the First United Methodist Church of La Grange.

"As a member of First United Methodist Church, I knew we had the accommodations to hold a large group of people for this event," Ruppert said. "We are hoping for a great turnout."

The cabaret group regularly volunteers their time and talents to perform to raise money for other nonprofit causes. The show will feature performances by a number of local cabaret artists, including Hillary Ann Feldman, Tracy Adams and Hannah Goldstone, with Steve Carson accompanying on piano.

"We are musicians so we don't generally make enough money to support community organizations by writing checks," said Feldman, who resides in Evanston. "But we can offer our love of cabaret and our skills as performers."

Suggested donations for the New Hope Connection/Acts of Kindness Cabaret are \$25 for adults, \$10 for students and \$50 for families. All proceeds will go directly toward New Hope Connection and their efforts to help the families they sponsor. For more information on how you can get involved in this very special night, call Deane Ruppert at (708) 246-7273.

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