



Newcomers Welcome



refugee
development center



A Letter from the Executive Director

Each day at the Refugee Development Center begins with a sense of purpose—and ends with a renewed sense of hope. Walking through our Newcomer Center, I am constantly reminded of the incredible energy, resilience, and joy that fills this space. Step into the preschool room in the morning, and you'll find little learners carefully painting, proudly recognizing letters, or listening intently in a reading circle. As the day unfolds, teens stream through the front doors with bustling energy, their laughter echoing in the hallways. They dive into leadership activities, academic support, and career exploration with a seriousness that shows just how invested they are in building a strong future.

All day long, you'll see parents—many of whom have just finished a long day at work—arriving for English classes, determined to improve their skills and expand their opportunities. Down the hall, a group of newcomers gathers for a homeownership workshop, asking thoughtful questions, envisioning stability, and taking concrete steps toward putting down roots in their new community.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary team. Our talented staff, dedicated board, generous volunteers, collaborative community and passionate learners work together every single day to create something truly special: a vibrant, inclusive space where everyone is welcome and everyone belongs.

We do this work in the face of difficult and often harmful policy changes that impact the lives of our students and families. And still—we press on. In fact, we are more committed than ever to cultivating a community space where newcomers and long-time residents can grow, connect, and thrive together.

Our community is enriched by its global diversity—heard in the many languages spoken in our classrooms, seen in the array of homemade meals shared during gatherings, and felt in the dreams and determination of entrepreneurs, parents, students, and neighbors. Newcomers are not just part of our community; they are our community. They are business owners and taxpayers, volunteers and caregivers, classmates and colleagues. They are our neighbors. They are our friends.

Thank you for believing in this work and for being part of this vibrant journey. Together, we're not just building programs—we're building a more connected, compassionate, and joyful community for all.



Erika Brown-Binion

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Erika Brown-Binion".

Executive Director,
Refugee Development Center





OUR MISSION

Our mission is to cultivate a welcoming, thriving community that collaborates with refugees and newcomers through education, engagement and support.

OUR HISTORY

The Refugee Development Center (RDC) is a grassroots organization offering formal and informal learning opportunities in an open and inclusive setting. The RDC opened in 2002 because the Greater Lansing community identified service area gaps for newcomer populations seeking self-sufficiency. The common denominator in the gaps identified revolved around education, and hence, the mission of the center was born. Today, the RDC helps serve as the link between newcomer populations and the private, public and faith-based communities in mid-Michigan.

DONATE

Our work is made possible by the generosity of our supporters. As a donor, your gift stays local, supporting the newcomers who strengthen and enrich our community. To give back to the Refugee Development Center, visit refugeedevelopmentcenter.org/en/donate.

VOLUNTEER

Our people make us strong. Over the years, we've established a dedicated community of volunteers who have a shared passion for both educating and learning from newcomers. To learn more about volunteer opportunities with the Refugee Development Center, contact us at volunteer@rdclansing.org.



OUR VALUES

Education: We believe in education as a catalyst for community engagement and action.

Compassion: We model empathy by encouraging and supporting people's self-efficacy and strengths.

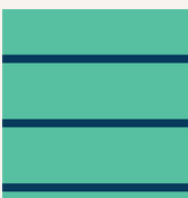
Collaboration: We are committed to working in collaboration with newcomers and community partners, knowing that we are stronger together.

Welcoming: We seek to engage new and longtime residents as neighbors to foster an open and inclusive community where all people's gifts are valued.

Cultural Humility/Inclusion: We firmly believe in the equal value of all humans and the importance of respecting and honoring each individual.

Innovation: We are committed to responsive services and continuous learning. We are open to new ideas, discovering new and better ways to assist with emerging and unmet needs.

Commitment: We value the passion and contributions of our staff, board, volunteers, community partners and newcomers in creating a just and welcoming community.



“At RDC, we are
all one family
from everywhere
in the world. That
is important.”







Programs

TO SUPPORT THE WHOLE PERSON



K-12 Youth Programs: Tutoring, mentoring, high school, college and career guidance, life skills classes, school orientations, and school-family engagement



First Steps: Early childhood education, preschool and nursery education, and play and learn groups



Workforce Development: Skills labs, career exploration, and college access assistance



Health and Housing Navigation: Landlord-tenant support, lease and pathway to home ownership guidance, insurance access, language support, and crisis intervention



Digital Literacy: Access to devices, internet, and computer classes



English Classes: Language education groups for all ages and skill levels, from emerging to advanced

Citizenship Preparation: Civics education and citizenship test preparation



Driving Lessons: Hands-on instruction in a state-of-the-art driving simulator



Wellness: Yoga, art, music, drumming, physical fitness, sewing, social clubs, tea time, and more



Cultural Brokers: Access to 30+ languages with cultural brokers and translations



Community Collaboration: Our programs are successful because of our collaborations. Many partners bring their expertise and services to our Newcomer Center to help our families access needed resources



Volunteers: Volunteers help make our programs possible and provide one on one assistance for students. Join us!
volunteer@rdclansing.org



Adult Education

Building language, confidence, and career pathways



About Adult Education

We offer English classes, digital literacy training, citizenship education and workforce development to help adult learners gain the skills they need to thrive in daily life and the workplace. One-on-one coaching ensures each participant receives personalized support on their journey.

Skills for Life & Work

From learning English to building computer skills, our programs equip adults to navigate work, community, and everyday responsibilities with confidence. Career-focused workshops and job readiness training help participants set and achieve their employment goals.

Support That Meets You Where You Are

Whether someone is learning to send an email, write a resume, or prepare for a job interview, our staff and volunteers provide individualized coaching in a welcoming, culturally responsive environment. We meet learners where they are—and grow from there.

About Health & Housing Navigation

We support newcomer families as they navigate complex health and housing systems. From finding a doctor to securing safe, stable housing, we help ensure families can access the services and resources they need to thrive.

Navigating with Confidence

Our team walks alongside families—connecting them to clinics, health insurance, rental support, and other essential services. With cultural brokers who speak over 30 languages, we ensure families feel understood, respected, and empowered to make informed decisions.

Building Stability & Wellness

Access to healthcare and housing is foundational to a strong start. By reducing barriers through language and culturally responsive support, we promote long-term stability, safety, and well-being for every family we serve.



Health and Housing Navigation

Guiding families to wellness and stability

First Steps

Building strong beginnings for lifelong learning



About First Steps

Our early child development program supports young children and their families as they begin their educational journey. Tailored for early learners, it builds foundational literacy skills and prepares children for preschool and kindergarten success.

Nurturing, Inclusive Learning

Children thrive in our safe, welcoming environment that honors their unique backgrounds and experiences. Our culturally responsive staff reflects the communities we serve—speaking many languages and fostering trust through shared understanding. Activities are thoughtfully designed to support each child's social, emotional, and academic growth including art, music, sensory activities, home visiting, and play and learn groups.

Families Growing Together

We empower parents as their child's first teachers through supportive play groups where families can learn, connect, and grow together. First Steps lays the groundwork for lifelong learning, confidence, and community belonging.

About Youth Programs

RDC's K-12 Youth Programs support newcomer students through a dynamic blend of academic support, creative enrichment, one-on-one mentoring, and career exploration. Whether through tutoring, hands-on projects, or community field trips, youth are encouraged to grow with confidence.

Learning, Leading, and Belonging

Through mentoring, homework help, life skills workshops, and field trips, youth build meaningful relationships, develop their identity, and gain tools to navigate school and community life. Activities encourage teamwork, curiosity, and self-expression in a supportive, welcoming environment.

Exploring Futures

Whether it's preparing for high school, college, or future careers, our programs empower youth to set goals and imagine what's possible. By investing in their education, talents, and leadership, we help shape the next generation of changemakers and community leaders.



K-12 Youth Programs

Inspiring connection, leadership, and growth



“The teachers all help people with their heart. It is a safe place for my children, my family.”

Wellness Programming

Healing, learning, and belonging—together



About Wellness Programming

Our wellness offerings—sewing, yoga, driving education, art, and music—give newcomers of all ages a chance to learn, express themselves, and connect through hands-on, healing experiences.

Whole-Person Wellbeing

Through creative and practical learning, participants gain valuable life skills, reduce stress, and discover new interests. Whether it's getting behind the wheel or onto a yoga mat, every activity supports mental, emotional, and physical wellness.

A Place to Belong

Held at our welcoming Newcomer Center, these programs foster friendship, trust, and connection. It's a safe, nurturing space where individuals and families can build community resilience and grow together.

About Family Engagement

Our Family Engagement program supports newcomer families as they navigate the American school system. Through personalized guidance and culturally responsive support, we help families build the knowledge and confidence they need to actively participate in their child's education.

Partnering with Families

From home visits and school orientations to tours and enrollment assistance, our team walks alongside families every step of the way.

Thriving in School and Beyond

When families are supported, students succeed. Our program strengthens the bridge between home and school, helping children thrive academically while building strong foundations for long-term success in school, family, and community life.



Family Engagement

Partnering with families for student success

Outreach and Engagement

Collaborating for a stronger, more welcoming region



About Outreach and Engagement

RDC's Outreach and Engagement efforts center on collaboration. We partner with local agencies to bring critical services directly into our Newcomer Center—places where families already gather—removing barriers and building trust through community-based access.

Connecting Services, Building Trust

By hosting partners on-site at our Newcomer Center, we connect families to essential resources in a familiar environment. From a CAPCAN advisor supporting FAFSA completion, to the Secretary of State's mobile office offering license renewals and tests, to Ingham ISD leading Play and Learn sessions—our partnerships make vital services more accessible.

Engaging the Community

We also reach outward—helping the broader community learn about the refugee and immigrant experience. Through events, presentations, and shared projects, we foster understanding, promote inclusion, and strengthen community-wide support for newcomers.

About Volunteering

From tutoring and mentoring to helping with sewing, literacy, or wellness activities, volunteers support newcomers across all of our programs—building bridges between long-time residents and new community members.

Growing Together

At RDC, volunteering is more than helping—it's about connection, compassion, and shared learning. As volunteers support newcomers, they often find that the experience transforms their own lives. Many say they gain more than they give.

Global Impact, Local Roots

You don't have to leave the country to make a difference in the world. Volunteering at RDC offers the chance to meet people from around the globe, learn about different cultures, and be part of a community where everyone is growing, together.



Volunteering

Local action, global connection

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thank you

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gracias





FUNDERS & PARTNERS

7C Lingo	Ingham Great Start Collaborative
ACCESS	Immigrant and Refugee Resource Collaborative
Accident Fund	Immigration Law and Justice Michigan
All Faith Alliance for Refugees	Islamic Center of East Lansing
All Saints Episcopal Church	Jackson
Allen Neighborhood Center	Just B Yoga
Advocates and Leaders for Police and Community Trust	Junior League
American Red Cross	Lansing Common FC
Anonymous Foundation	Lansing Community College
Capital Area Housing Partnership	Lansing Arts Council
Capital Area College Access Network	Lansing School District
Capital Area District Library	Lansing Economic Area Partnership
Capital Area Literacy Coalition	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
Capital Area Michigan Works!	Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Capital Area Transportation Authority	Michigan Secretary of State
Capital Area United Way	Michigan State University Center for Community Engaged Learning
Capital Region Community Foundation	Michigan State University- College of Education
Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton and Clinton Counties	Michigan State University- College of Engineering
CASE Credit Union	Michigan State University- Residential College of Arts and Humanities
Central Free Methodist Church	Michigan State University- Immigration Law Clinic
Central United Methodist Church	Office of Global Michigan
City of Lansing	Peckham
Child and Family Charities	Power of We
Clarkston United Methodist Church	REACH Studio Art Center
Community Mental Health	Redhead Creative Consultancy
Davies Project	Samaritas
Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity	Tri-County Office on Aging
Eastminster Presbyterian Church-East Lansing	Southside Community Kitchen
Financial Empowerment Center	Summerplace Townhomes
Health Equity Council	Teacher Liz
Global Institute of Lansing	Tri-County Office on Aging
Great Parents, Great Start	United Way of South Central Michigan
Greater Lansing Food Bank- Garden Project	Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing
Ingham County	Welcome U.S.
Ingham County Health Department	WKAR
Ingham Intermediate School District	And many generous donors

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Warm Up: copy +

Change

Simple

On Tuesdays, I

I eat toast

The

“In my life, I like
three things: my
country, my wife,
and RDC.”



As a community, every person, place and organization plays a critical role in building our collective strength. At the Refugee Development Center, we constantly witness the inherent strength of newcomers firsthand. These individuals bring endless skills and perspectives – and with additional support from resources, education and navigation, they add to our community, making it even stronger as a result. When each element of a structure is stronger, the whole is stronger. When we have strong partners to lean on, we can share the burden of life's challenges. And when we uplift others, we uplift everyone.

How to Volunteer
volunteer@rdclansing.org

How to Donate
rdclansing.org

