

# Assisting With New Life in New Country

**Agency:** Sioux Falls School District

**Program:** School Home Liaison Refugee and Immigrant Program

**Service:** Liaisons work with refugee and immigrant families to help them adjust to a new culture and language. The liaisons also help other school staff understand the cultures from where the families originate.

**Need:** Each year more than 260 refugees and immigrants resettle in Sioux Falls. Approximately 80% of these are families with preschool or school-aged children.

**Impact:** Research on the impact of school, family, and community connections on students' achievements have found that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and throughout life. Operating from five Immersion Centers, School Home Liaisons assist the families of 216 children from 24 different countries who speak more than 17 languages and dialects.

Arriving in Sioux Falls during the coldness of December was an eye-opener to Jean Pierre and his wife Beatrice. "We arrived here not knowing English, and it was so cold," remembers Jean Pierre. His wife Beatrice adds, "We were so far from home and started to feel all alone."

They quickly found help from many individuals and organizations. "Our landlord was wonderful. He helped us understand how to heat our house that first winter and made sure we had Christmas presents. And we found help for daycare," continues Jean Pierre. One of the many programs to assist their family right away was the School Home Liaison Refugee and Immigrant Program through the Sioux Falls School District.

While Jean Pierre spent his days at work at a local hotel, Beatrice and her four young children spent their days participating in the program's Immersion Center at a Sioux Falls elementary school.

"I knew no English when I started at the Immersion Center," explains Beatrice. "I was able to take my children there and have daycare. Other families were also there, and we all learned English together."

Jean Pierre and Beatrice's family was in the program from 2000-2002. In that time, they were able to take English lessons, learn about the school system, attend school conferences with an interpreter, gain independence by learning how to use the public transportation system, and were assisted in their job searches.

The program has grown and evolved in the 7 years since they finished their participation. To make room for an increasing number of students who need basic English instruction, adult education classes with child care are now held through Lutheran Social Services. School Home Liaisons now communicate with new families about school programs and student progress. They also work to involve families in school activities, encourage them to assist with their children's homework, and coordinate with other resources to provide services.

More than 200 children and their families currently participate in the School Home Liaison Refugee and Immigrant Program. Your support of Sioux Empire United Way ensures the important connection between school and family is made for these children.

And for Jean Pierre and Beatrice's family, the program was one part of their successful move to Sioux Falls. Both now have full-time jobs and their children are successful in school. "To have this program's help and support meant so much. It is a good program."

