

Refugee Elders Program

Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc.

The Refugee Elders Program of Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc., is designed to improve the overall wellness and quality of life of elderly refugees, all of whom have been forced to flee their homes, experiencing persecution, war, violence, and/or the deaths of family and friends. Program staff note that refugee seniors are at a high risk for decreasing physical and mental health, isolation, and financial dependence. As such, program staff assess at intake the health needs, level of acculturation, and English ability of each elder. Necessary health referrals are made, most often involving management of chronic illnesses, eye care, and mental health. After intake, clients are immediately scheduled to attend program activities at least twice per week for at least one year.

English language training takes place on Mondays for literate clients and Thursdays for pre-literate clients. This English and citizenship preparation portion of the Refugee Elders Program is designed to combat isolation, allowing refugee senior opportunities to communicate with each other and their neighbors, as well as work to keep their government assistance through attaining citizenship status. The seniors are also given the opportunity to meet new friends, both from their home country and around the world, who are in similar situations. This gives them an added sense of purpose and enthusiasm.

On Wednesdays, all clients participate in off-site activities designed to enhance their physical and mental well-being, maintain their independence, and help with their integration into their new community. Specifically, they participate in activities such as health fairs, exercise and shuffle board at a nearby community center, health screenings, yoga, and field trips to places of cultural and historical relevance.

Transportation is provided to and from program activities, free of charge. At least 20 elders (age 50 and above), from a variety of countries, are served through the program annually, all receiving a minimum of six hours of services per week. Supported by foundation funding, the Refugee Elders Program is ongoing, providing services to refugee seniors for as long as they want or are able to participate.