

World Relief Durham's Efforts for Immigrant Equity



by Adam Clark
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World Relief Durham (WRD) is working towards achieving one main goal in the Triangle region: immigrant equity. For hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians who were born in another country, life presents numerous obstacles that those of us born in the United States could not imagine. As these neighbors, friends and family members of ours work, care for their loved ones, seek medical attention, pursue studies, pay taxes and contribute to our community right here in the Triangle, inequity meets them at every turn.

Here in Durham, about 15% of residents were born outside of the U.S. Foreign-born residents make up about 8% of the overall North Carolina population. And the inequities faced by many of these immigrant community members are all too common. For example, they are faced with housing discrimination, medical providers who struggle to communicate with them on a basic level, missed weather warnings, school cancellation notices, employers who misunderstand many immigrants' work eligibility. . . The list goes on, but all of these barriers are directly related to inequitable access to information and services in the languages our immigrant neighbors speak. During the pandemic, hundreds of immigrant children/students and their parents did not receive vital information about virtual learning in a language they could understand, leaving some children/students without schooling for weeks or even months. We even found some waiting for the school bus outside on the first day of virtual learning. Sadly, these systemic inequities are often compounded by additional personal encounters with xenophobia and racism in the community. That is why we want any conversation about equity—in companies, schools, hospitals, and everywhere—to include immigrant equity. Immigrants are often even left out of conversations meant to include the marginalized.

That is where World Relief comes in. Since its founding in the 1940s to serve those who had been displaced by World War II, World Relief has been working to love and serve vulnerable populations around the world. Since 2007, World Relief Durham's purpose, as a faith-based humanitarian nonprofit, is to assist low-income refugees and immigrants to rebuild their lives, become integrated in the community, and achieve economic self-sufficiency. We want immigrants to thrive and experience equity in every corner of our community.

In the last fifteen years, WRD has partnered with over 150 churches, employers and community organizations, and has served thousands of refugees and other immigrants. We have programming that assists clients in the areas of employment, healthcare, mental health, navigating public education, housing, youth mentoring, intensive case management, immigration legal services, connection to English language learning, and much more. WRD seeks to support newcomers in the Triangle as they move from initial arrival to stability and ultimately healthy community integration. Many of our clients come as refugees through the U.S. State Department, others are referred by the public school system or find us on their own as they seek services for which they may be eligible—including legal services. For many, we are able to help them find their first job, teach financial literacy, and walk step-by-step with them towards self-sufficiency and healthy integration into the Triangle.

Many thanks to the employers who hire North Carolinians born outside of the U.S. Our economy and our culture is enriched by the assets immigrants contribute when they are able to flourish (immigrants account for 11% of North Carolina's annual GDP—approximately \$59.6 billion in economic output)[1]. And by working toward immigrant equity, we not only strengthen the Triangle for everyone, but we live up to some of our best values as a society and practice true southern hospitality. And for any Christians reading this, welcoming and serving immigrants is as Biblical as Jesus (himself a refugee). World Relief's book, [Welcoming the Stranger](#)[2] is a great next step to learn more. And for all of us—of any faith background, race, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status—we have reasons to work toward immigrant equity on behalf of the 15% of us in Durham who are immigrants and on behalf of the principles and values that have given birth to Built2Last.

[1] NC Budget and Tax Center (June 2023). Report: "Immigrants in the North Carolina Economy: Overcoming hurdles, yet still facing barriers." https://ncbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/50-State_Earning-NORTH-CAROLINA.pdf

[2] <https://worldrelief.org/welcoming-the-stranger/>