Who Brings Refugees to South Dakota?
Currently there are an estimated 19.5 million people from around the world who have fled their homes because of religious, political and racial persecution. These people are the world’s refugees. The U.S. Government, as determined by the President of the United States, allowed approximately 69,990 refugees to enter our country last year. About 35 to 40 percent of refugees resettled in the U.S. are children.

The U.S. Department of State works with the National Voluntary Agencies to establish the number of refugees placed in each state. Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota helped resettle 358 individuals within Sioux Falls and 137 in Huron in FY2015. This is less than 1% of the total population of refugees resettled in the U.S.

Why Does the U.S. Resettle Refugees?
The United States is one of many countries around the world that have committed to resettling refugees as a part of a global humanitarian mission. This mission began after WWII when the U.S. resettled more than 250,000 displaced Europeans. According to the U.S. Department of State, resettling refugees “reflects our own tradition as a nation of immigrants and refugees. It is an important, enduring and ongoing expression of our commitment to international humanitarian principles.”

What is the Difference Between a Refugee and an Immigrant?
Immigrants choose to leave their homes and come to the United States whereas refugees flee their homes because they are afraid for their personal safety. Refugees are unable to return home because of persecution.

Immigrants may come to the U.S. with temporary visas, allowing them to remain for a certain period of time or under certain conditions (such as students or tourists), or they may have permission allowing them to remain indefinitely. Refugees arrive with temporary residency and may apply for legal permanent residency after one year in the United States. After five years, legal permanent residents may apply for U.S. citizenship.

How Does LSS Help Refugees?
At the request of the state, LSS assumed oversight of refugee resettlement in South Dakota in 2000. The state of South Dakota continues to oversee refugee medical assistance, but LSS has taken the lead in oversight of cash assistance and program services. LSS operates refugee resettlement offices in Sioux Falls and Huron. The primary goals for all services are self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment. LSS provides six core services:

- Community Orientation & Education
- Case Management
- Employment Services
- English Language Training
- Immigration Services
- Interpreter Services.

LSS provides assistance with initial housing and basic needs items. Through federal funding, refugees are eligible for up to eight months of cash assistance beginning at date of arrival to the United States. To receive this money, employable adults must cooperate with an employment program and case manager, attend at least 6 hours a week of English language training, and attend 39 hours of community orientation. LSS case management and employment services are available to newcomers for up to five years after arrival. All refugees are legally qualified to work upon arrival. Employment services assist employable adults in finding the first job as well as job upgrades. English language training is available four days and two evenings a
week. Classes focus on oral and written English skills. LSS immigration attorneys assist refugees who are pursuing permanent residency or U.S. citizenship.

What Security Measures Are Taken?
Refugees are screened and go through in-depth background checks prior to receiving refugee status and before resettlement. Information is gathered and interviews are conducted by the United Nation’s High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly the INS), FBI and the US Embassy.

Understanding Refugees & the Process
People don’t seek to be part of the world’s refugee population. Coming to the United States as a refugee is a thorough process. Generally speaking, it may take up to ten years or more. So how does it happen?

1. First, you live in a country where you are persecuted because of your race, religion, ethnicity, social group or political opinion. You fled when your life was threatened and ran to another country to seek safety.
2. You apply to the United Nation’s High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for protection.
3. You are assigned to a refugee camp where you may stay for years before being accepted for resettlement into another country. The United States is one of many countries that resettle refugees.
4. You meet with a U.S. government official to compile personal information.
5. The U.S. government conducts multiple security checks.
7. You may be denied at this point. But if you progress, you will be fingerprinted, photographed and subject to a series of medical checks.
8. After all of this is completed and approved, you wait for resettlement. The U.S. government assigns you to a refugee resettlement agency like LSS of South Dakota. Remember, the United States only accepts a fraction of the world’s refugee population.
9. As you wait in the refugee camps for resettlement, you have an opportunity to learn about the country and culture you will soon be joining.
10. Finally you travel to a new land, often with just the clothes on your back.

What is Secondary Migration?
A secondary refugee or secondary migrant is defined as a person who was resettled as a refugee in another state and has moved within the United States. Secondary migrants may choose to move to South Dakota for many reasons. Some may have family members in South Dakota. Others may be attracted by employment opportunities or because of the high quality of life found here. Secondary migrants are eligible for services from LSS if they have been in the country for less than five years. LSS would only become aware of a secondary migrant if they sought services and were within the five year timeframe. In 2015, LSS provided services for 162 secondary migrants.

A Strong Tradition of Service
As early as 1948, LSS began with a vision to provide resettlement services to displaced people from Europe following World War II. Continuing the strong tradition, LSS welcomes people who are in search of a safe haven from Burma, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan as well as a variety of other countries.