

History and Background

Augustana Lutheran Church has been helping refugees and immigrants in WNY for more than 25 years.

In 2007, Augustana instituted the Refugee and Immigrant Driving Program to help individuals earn their driver's licenses. It is the only program of its kind in Western New York.

Referrals are received from former participants and from WNY agencies including Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Service, the International Institute, Journey's End and local schools.

Students are welcomed into the program without regard to religious beliefs. We ask the students to share their knowledge and help others on their path toward earning a driver's license. Program graduates are now contributing their time by helping current driving program students, as well as members of their families and community members.

By earning their driver's license, refugees and immigrants are able to gain increased access to employment opportunities and healthcare, as well as expanded ability to choose neighborhoods and schools, and participate in community activities.

How the Driving Program Works

First step: Volunteers meet at the church to assemble classroom training materials. Group instruction is then provided at the church by additional volunteers. Instruction is centered around topics that help the students prepare for the permit test.

Next steps: When individuals are ready to take the permit test, volunteers meet them at a local Department of Motor Vehicles office and help them complete the paperwork. If students pass the permit test, they are reimbursed for the permit fee. Depending on the amount of available funds, as many individuals as possible are enrolled in professional driving lessons, culminating in the students taking their road test.

Outcomes

Augustana volunteers have aided more than 100 participants from 30 different countries in obtaining driver's licenses. Additional participants have earned their driving permit.

How You Can Help

Costs, from training materials to the permit test fee and professional driving lessons, are paid for by donations from congregational partners, individuals, Lutheran Charities, Thrivent Financial, and the Lutheran Foundation of WNY.

There is always a waiting list to be in the program. With increased donations and volunteers, more refugees could be assisted. Augustana is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization. Donations can be made payable and sent to:

**Augustana Lutheran Church
3143 Eggert Road
Tonawanda, NY 14150
Church Office: (716) 832-5720
Or contact Paul Kennedy: (716) 228-3091**

We are grateful for your support!