



PRERNA Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) June 2017

1. What is PRERNA?

- PRERNA is a non-profit humanitarian organization focused on empowering refugee families from conflict-ridden countries around the globe. Our mission is to help refugees across all ethnicities and faiths become independent, constructive citizens in the United States.
- After a decade of helping refugees, PRERNA was established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2015 to expand our services. PRERNA has helped refugee families restart their lives in Arizona, New York, Ohio, North Dakota and California.
- Currently located in Santa Clara County, PRERNA was founded by Meena Sankaran, an immigrant from India, who is committed to giving back to her community. Through her firsthand experience immigrating into the U.S. as a student and working closely with refugees, she has a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties involved in assimilating into a new country.
- Meena learned about the many gaps in the refugee resettlement system by working directly with hundreds of refugees and has used this knowledge to build PRERNA's tried, tested and successful program.
- Our services meet many needs including basic housing, supplies, healthcare, education, employment, cultural assimilation and more. This continuum of care leads refugees on a path towards independence, while giving families the opportunities to rebuild their lives.
- Learn more about the various program services we provide to refugee families by visiting our website at www.prerna4refugees.org/programs.

2. Why is there a need for PRERNA?

- Millions of families are being forced to flee for their lives from conflict-ridden countries and the number of refugees is rising daily.
- According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees and internally displaced people has reached its highest point since the Second World War.
- That means one in every 113 people worldwide have been forced to flee their home. A refugee's chances of returning home are lower than any time in the last 30 years.
- The U.S. has resettled more than 895,000 refugees from around the world since October 2001 and California ranks as the number one state in the U.S. to host refugees.
- Santa Clara County has been designated a "Refugee-Impacted County" because of the large numbers of refugees residing here.
- Currently, there are only nine Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) that have cooperative agreements with the U.S. State Department to provide refugees with limited support and services. Those services only last for 90-120 days.
- There's a fundamental need for a qualitative approach that provides refugee families extended care and guidance for as long as needed, which is why PRERNA's valuable program services are so essential.
- We are currently meeting a vital need in the Bay Area counties of Santa Clara and Alameda by providing accessible support services to refugee families.
- PRERNA offers families the structure and support they require to not only resettle but to thrive in their new country.
- Families are nurtured, equipped with basic furnishings and home supplies; and connected to a network of support, which helps stop the cycle of poverty and provides a path towards a better future.

3. How is PRERNA different from other non-profit organizations that provide refugee services?
 - PRERNA is an all-volunteer non-profit organization. Over 96 percent of donations received in 2016 were allocated to program services.
 - In addition to program services, PRERNA helps provide the first month rent, a security deposit and assistance to set up utilities, a computer, internet services, a cell phone and other essential needs.
 - PRERNA works with refugees on a continuing basis well beyond the 90-120 day fixed timeline and extends services based on the evolution of the families' needs for up to five years.
 - PRERNA has an all-women board and over 90 percent of volunteers are women.
 - PRERNA actively believes in the concept of "Paying it Forward" and has resettled refugees who are now volunteering to help newly arrived refugee families.
 - PRERNA believes in involving youth in our community by influencing them as the future generation to display resilience, gratitude and innovation. These experiences are very important as the proportion of the youth population increases globally.
 - PRERNA's impact is evidenced through a qualitative approach rather than quantitative policy. Our volunteers practice a high-contact model of building relationships with individuals and families.
 - Unlike faith- or ethnicity-based organizations, PRERNA helps ALL refugees, regardless of belief and country of origin.
 - PRERNA has built an ecosystem of partner service organizations to help complement our activities that provide the best outcome for assimilating refugee families.
4. What is the definition of a refugee?
 - All refugees are legal permanent U.S. residents.
 - Under international and U.S. law, a refugee is defined as an individual who has fled his or her country of origin because of a credible fear of persecution due to race, religion, political opinion, national origin or social group.
 - It does not include those who flee their homes but stay within the boundaries of their country. These individuals are classified as "Internally Displaced Persons."
 - It does not include asylum-seekers who are individuals who have fled their country and applied for asylum by making a formal application for the right to remain in another country. They keep that status until the application has been evaluated and concluded.
 - It does not include the millions of immigrants who enter the U.S. voluntarily for the primary purpose of employment, education and other opportunistic reasons.
5. What is the refugee vetting process?
 - The U.S. government admits individuals for resettlement only after a thorough screening abroad to ensure that each person meets the legal definition of a refugee and that they do not pose a national security or health threat.
 - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refers the vast majority of U.S. refugees. Most refugees are either living in refugee camps or in an urban environment outside of camps.
 - The process involves the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security and Defense as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Counterterrorism Center.
 - The vetting process generally takes three to 18 months and includes in-person interviews, biometric background checks and interviews with third parties that may have information about the individual being considered for resettlement to the U.S.
 - Only a fraction of one percent of the world's refugees are admitted for resettlement to the U.S. in any given year, so priority is given to those who are deemed to be most vulnerable, including a majority who are women or children.

6. How are refugees referred to PRERNA?
 - The refugees that are selected for resettlement in the U.S. are admitted with legal status and are assigned to one of nine national voluntary agencies (VOLAGS).
 - Through a network of government and social service agencies, PRERNA works with relevant VOLAGs to accept local refugees and their families into our program based on their needs and our capacity to support them.
 - Refugees who are clients of PRERNA have also referred newly arrived refugee families who need assistance.

7. What is PRERNA's history?
 - PRERNA's origins started more than a decade ago when Meena Sankaran, the founder, began helping refugees resettle into various U.S. communities.
 - In 2015, PRERNA was established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to expand its services.
 - In 2015, PRERNA also offered a second program, Prerna4Sherpas, that gave critical assistance to the Sherpa community in Nepal when two severe earthquakes caused total devastation and displaced 2.8 million Nepalese. The disaster completely destroyed nearly all of the homes in some areas.
 - PRERNA helped rebuild homes in villages near the Himalayan mountains. Through direct contact and support to the Sherpas, we provided basic relief and sustenance to Nepalese families. Read more at www.prerna4refugees.org/blog.

8. What are some examples of PRERNA's impact?
 - PRERNA supported and guided several refugee students who began learning English in 2008. They have advanced to higher education as engineering college students.
 - We encourage refugee youth to actively pursue higher education and assist them with enrollment and financial aid applications.
 - PRERNA has a strong success record in empowering adults to become proficient in English, so they can find employment and earn a sustainable income.
 - We provide resources and guidance to adults that give them the opportunity to transition into professional jobs and careers.
 - We help families obtain drivers' licenses and cars, which allows them to become truly independent in their communities.
 - We empower families to exit the CalWORKs welfare system as quickly as possible to minimize financial assistance from community tax dollars.
 - We refer families to financial experts to help them pay income taxes and become financially literate and independent.
 - PRERNA's youth engagement program with refugees and innovative approaches of care encourages young people to become volunteers who support newcomers.
 - PRERNA maximizes the federal funds allocated to refugees during their first 90 days after arrival, by providing supplemental support for housing, supplies and other immediate needs. This is one of the most critical periods for successful refugee resettlement.

9. What did PRERNA achieve in 2016?
 - In 2016, PRERNA served 30 refugees across multiple ethnicities through a continuum of essential services, case management, mentoring and after-care programs.
 - More than 96% of all donations were directly allocated to refugee services.
 - Twenty-four partnerships were developed with various community organizations.
 - PRERNA received more than \$10,000 through in-kind donations.
 - Volunteers together contributed more than a total of 6,000 hours to help build the organization in its first year.
 - After an average of 9-12 months, 100 percent of refugee families under PRERNA's guidance met their goals of long-term housing, sustainable income and continued education.

- 10. What is PRERNA's vision and plans in the next five years?**
- We will continue to provide services and guidance to refugees for up to five years and maintain a high level of qualitative service, which is one of PRERNA's distinctions.
 - As of the spring of 2017, we are supporting 50 refugees and actively planning on adding 50 more this year.
 - We'd like to see a 100 percent annual increase in the number of refugees we serve over the next five years. This will depend on the growth of funding and the capacity of our volunteer staff.
 - By end of 2018, our goal is to support 200 refugees while continuing to increase the scale of support by raising awareness, community outreach and building the partner ecosystem needed to sustain this growth.
 - PRERNA's long-term goal is to become an official affiliate of a VOLAG so we can influence the number of refugees entering the U.S.
 - PRERNA also hopes to expand its reach to more refugees in other regions based on the availability of volunteer staff and financial resources from individual donors, corporate initiatives, grants and foundations.
- 11. What are the demographics of the refugees that PRERNA serves?**
- The refugees that PRERNA supports range greatly in age from two to 75 years old.
 - They are very diverse in background and have come from Afghanistan, Burma, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Ukraine and Zambia.
 - Approximately 60% of the refugees we help are children under the age of 18.
 - Nearly one-third of them are illiterate and 80 percent of our clients speak little to no English.
 - We try to start with one family member who speaks English well enough to start baseline communication without the need of a translator whenever possible.
- 12. How is PRERNA organized?**
- PRERNA is led by an Executive Director who is responsible for day-to-day operations which includes overseeing all volunteer staff, budgets, program strategy and execution, board planning and recruitment, partner strategy, refugee traction and resources as well as developing business plans in collaboration with the board.
 - Our Board of Directors brings non-profit expertise in strategic planning and execution as well as cross-functional experience to program services.
 - Program services are run by team leaders and include Housing and Supplies, Healthcare, Education, Employment, Professional Services, Events and Cultural Assimilation.
 - Our partnership development and marketing teams focus on refugee advocacy, building community support, forging new partnerships and raising brand awareness.
 - On the operational side, we have an administrative team that is responsible for volunteer recruitment and coordination, accounting, bookkeeping and general support.
 - In 2017, we plan to recruit a Fund Development Manager and Programs Director to scale up the organization to address short- and long-term needs.
 - The organization is structured to focus on providing a continuum of high qualitative care while building a sound foundation to support scalability and sustainability.
 - To keep a continual flow of volunteers engaged with a minimum number of hours committed, we break down projects into tasks that can be reasonably achieved.
- 13. How is PRERNA funded?**
- PRERNA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax-exempt organization registered in the U.S. Our tax ID number is 47-4883492.
 - As a non-profit, PRERNA relies on the generosity of individual donors, corporations and foundation grants.
 - Unlike national refugee resettlement agencies (VOLAGs), PRERNA does not receive any financial support from local, state, and/or federal governments.

- 14. Does PRERNA work with partners to provide services to refugees?**
- Yes, partnerships are a critical backbone of PRERNA's strategy for growth and scalability.
 - As one of only a few nonprofits dedicated solely to the support of refugee families in the Bay Area, PRERNA works collaboratively with many community providers to complement our services.
 - PRERNA works actively with the VOLAGs or national resettlement agencies that refer refugees to us.
 - Our core service partnerships are categorized around the following:
 - Housing (landlords, apartment complexes, motels, etc.)
 - Transportation (moving companies, limousine drivers, etc.)
 - Supplies (clothing stores, bicycle shops, thrift stores, storage facilities, etc.)
 - Education (schools, book stores, tutoring services, etc.)
 - Healthcare (doctors, dentists, medical facilities, pharmacies, etc.)
 - Employment (human resource recruiters, employers, etc.)
 - Professional Services (tax attorneys, accountants (CPAs), lawyers, etc.)
 - Community Outreach (advocacy groups, government agencies, non-profits, etc.)
 - If you are interested in partnering with PRERNA, contact partners@prerna4refugees.org.
 - See a list of PRERNA's existing community partners at www.prerna4refugees.org/partner.
- 15. How can I become a volunteer? What are the minimum requirements to volunteer?**
- PRERNA is an all-volunteer non-profit organization and we continually seek dedicated volunteers in the Bay Area to help with program services.
 - Depending on your interest and expertise, opportunities to help refugees find housing, supplies, healthcare services, education options and employment opportunities are available.
 - We also seek mentors and Family Ambassadors who are interested in spending time with refugee youth and families as advocates for their various needs.
 - Virtual opportunities are also available for volunteers who wish to help remotely in the areas of marketing, research and administration.
 - Minimum requirements vary depending on the position and begin at five hours a week.
 - We welcome student volunteers, especially those who like to help out in the Bay Area.
 - To see our current openings, visit our website at www.prerna4refugees.org/get-involved.
- 16. Does PRERNA accept in-kind donations? How can I donate computers, bicycles, furniture or other items?**
- Yes, we accept in-kind donations, which are based on the needs of the refugee families.
 - Desktop and laptop computers, cell phones and electronic equipment are in high demand as refugees need to be quickly connected to communications.
 - School supplies, bicycles and helmets are welcome at any time as they can be easily stored and are needed by refugee children.
 - Furniture and clothing are accepted based on the needs of the families.
 - Tax receipts are provided based on the in-kind donations provided.
 - Our partnerships with moving companies help us with pick-ups from donors and drop-offs for the families.
 - We store and replenish in-kind donations in a modest-sized public storage facility.
 - For questions about in-kind donations of products or services, please contact supplies@prerna4refugees.org to find out about our current needs.
 - We can only accept items that are in good condition.
- 17. How else can I support refugees who are resettling in our community?**
- Consider volunteering or making a cash donation to support PRERNA in our mission to help refugees rebuild their lives in the Bay Area.

- No matter how big or small, your one-time or monthly contribution will make a difference to transform the lives of refugee families. Give a gift today at www.prerna4refugees.org/donate.
- Sign up for our email list at <http://tiny.cc/f6w6ky>.
- Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram to share the latest news about PRERNA.
 - ▶ [facebook.com/prerna4refugees](https://www.facebook.com/prerna4refugees)
 - ▶ twitter.com/prerna4refugees
 - ▶ [instagram.com/prerna4refugees](https://www.instagram.com/prerna4refugees)
 - ▶ [linkedin.com/company/prerna-4-refugees](https://www.linkedin.com/company/prerna-4-refugees)

References

1. By the Numbers: The United States of Refugees. Research by Megan Alpert; Smithsonian Magazine, April 2017
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/by-numbers-united-states-refugees-180962487/#TAJFdjuwWySKLLml.99>
2. Refugee Integration in the United States. Center for American Progress, June 2016 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2016/06/16/139551/refugee-integration-in-the-united-states>
3. Refugee Resettlement in the United States. Refugee Council USA, January 2017
<http://www.rcusa.org/community-welcome-of-refugees>
4. Refugee Voices. Tent Research: Phase 3 Combined Report, December 2016
<http://www.tent.org/research-index>
5. U.S. Refugee Resettlement Facts. United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), February 2017
<http://refugeecongress.org/u-s-resettlement-fact-sheet>
6. With One Human in Every 113 Affected, Forced Displacement Hits Record High. United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) June 20, 2016
www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2016/6/5763ace54/1-human-113-affected-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html
7. Refugee-Impacted Counties. Certain California counties where large populations of refugees reside are designated as refugee-impacted counties. These refugee-impacted counties offer additional employment and social services to refugees. Refugees who live in these counties may also be eligible for special employment services, training and cash assistance.
www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Refugees/CRCs/Refugee-Impacted-Counties
8. Supplementary Poverty Measure. Estimates poverty rates by looking at factors other than an individual or family's cash income. It incorporates additional items such as tax payments and work expenses in its resource estimates. The new measure is derived from expenditure data on basic necessities and is adjusted for geographic differences in the cost of housing.
www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/overview.html

Contact PRERNA

Email: info@prerna4refugees.org

Website: www.prerna4refugees.org

Phone: 203-794-6271

Mail: 1400 Coleman Avenue, Suite A21, Santa Clara, CA 95050

EIN: 47-4883492