



Building Belonging in Minnesota | April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025

When refugees and other displaced newcomers arrive in the U.S., they bring something far more valuable than possessions: their experiences, skills, and dreams. But the path forward is steep. Without a support network, navigating unfamiliar systems to find housing, work, transportation and learning the language can feel like an impossible climb. And yet, newcomers persist, driven by an unshakable desire to rebuild, succeed, contribute, and belong.

Since launching our domestic programming in 2021, Alight has become a [trusted guide in Minnesota's newcomer community](#). We walk alongside new Americans as they navigate unfamiliar systems, connect with educational and employment opportunities, and build meaningful relationships in their neighborhoods. What began with resettling Afghan families and supporting sponsor groups has evolved into a flexible, responsive network, [ready to adapt as the needs of newcomers change](#).

Anticipating the eventual closing of immigration pathways and the new needs that would follow, [Alight joined the Minnesota Resettlement Network Services coalition](#) in Fall 2024. By planning ahead, we were ready to support newcomers when programs like *Uniting for Ukraine* and the *Welcome Corps* ended and resettlement agencies shuttered, cutting newcomers off from critical services. Alight's new programming has provided a lifeline in a climate where harmful rhetoric often overshadows the truth: nearly 60% of Minnesota's job growth since 2019 has come from foreign-born workers (*Minnesota Chamber Foundation, February 2025*).

Our work now centers on three key areas:

- [Systems and Resource Navigation](#) – Guiding newcomers to access stable housing, benefits, transportation, and cultural orientation
- [Employment and Career Pathways](#) – Supporting first jobs and job readiness, career upgrades and education, and long-term professional growth
- [Community Building](#) – Fostering long-term stability and a sense of belonging through events, cultural experiences, and peer networks that help people explore the unfamiliar together

At Alight, innovation is in our DNA. We co-create solutions with newcomers, designing programs that are not just desirable, but practical and lasting. We pilot, refine, and grow ideas so that every service is responsive to the people we serve—today and in the future.

[And we're just getting started.](#) Together, with our partners and supporters, we will keep building a Minnesota where every newcomer has the chance to thrive.

Activities & Outcomes

Systems and Resource Navigation

Helping newcomers access essential services, understand complex systems, and connect to the resources they need to build stable and fulfilling lives.

- **Private Sponsorship** – In the final six months of our *Uniting for Ukraine* and *Welcome Corps* partnerships, [100 Alight sponsors](#) helped [28 newcomers](#) begin new chapters in the United States. Since 2022, Alight has guided more than 1,000 sponsors to welcome 750 displaced people to safety, stability, and opportunity in the U.S.
- **Ask Alight** – A trusted lifeline for Afghan and Ukrainian households, this secure online tool connects families directly to resources, support, and opportunities. This year, more than [270 Afghan](#) and [28 Ukrainian newcomer households](#) stayed informed, connected, and engaged through community announcements, events, program updates, and surveys in their preferred languages.
- **Family Resource Connections & Community Workshops** – In just the first 3 months of these new programs, [92 newcomers](#) gained access to housing, benefits, transportation, and childcare, while learning to navigate American systems and culture with confidence.

Employment and Career Pathways

Two new complementary programs help newcomers enter the workforce, upgrade skills & build lasting careers.

- In the first 3 months of the Employment & Career Services program, [20 job seekers secured initial placements, enrolled in English classes, and built job readiness skills](#), tackling common barriers to employment head-on.
- At the same time, Alight designed its new STAR program to [create personalized career pathway plans](#) that connect refugees with education to launch 30 clients per year into long-term careers.
- Together, these programs aim to serve at least [150 newcomers each year](#), equipping them not only with first jobs but with opportunities for lasting advancement.

Community, Belonging & Support System Building

Strengthening connections, fostering cultural understanding, and creating a sense of belonging for all.

Afghan Community Engagement

- **Women's Sewing Social** – Afghan women continue to build confidence, skills, and friendships in this women-only space. Since 2022, participants have reported a [66.7% decrease in loneliness](#) and a [47.8% decrease in depression](#). Led this year by a graduate of Cohort Two, women gathered weekly to build sewing skills, strengthen financial and digital literacy, learn public transit and safety, and access benefits and healthcare—all while their children were happily engaged. In FY25, Cohort Three included [20 women](#) and [15 children](#), extending a cycle of empowerment that goes far beyond the classroom.
- **Community Celebrations & Support** – Afghan families came together with Alight staff and volunteers for *Eid*, celebrated [Afghan Independence Day](#) at an August picnic, and [received 8,184 weekly-distributed meals](#) for the newest arriving families from April–October 2024, through an Alight partnership with Second Harvest Heartland & CAPI.

Ukrainian Community Engagement

- **Friday Wellness Group** – Led by Alight staff, Ukrainian newcomers gather weekly at the Ukrainian American Community Center to [focus on health, wellness, and community building](#), creating a safe space for connection and mutual support.
- **Storytelling** – Ukrainian newcomers shared their voices through a [traveling exhibit](#) designed in

partnership with Green Card Voices and the Ukrainian American Community Center, preserving their experiences and opening doors to connection with other communities.

Spanish-Speaking Community Engagement

- 50 Spanish-speaking newcomers shared their perspectives and needs in dedicated sessions, guiding how Alight can complement and strengthen support for communities that once relied on now-closed resettlement agencies.
- Spanish-speaking adults and children in a Minneapolis shelter received 600 Comfort Kits, assembled in partnership with KPMG volunteers.

Broader Community Engagement

- More than 600 community members attended Alight's open house during Art-A-Whirl 2024.
- Volunteers & staff engaged with ~800 people at Twin Cities Pride 2024.
- Alight engaged with ~500 people as co-hosts of the 2024 World Refugee Day event with CAPI.
- Alight piloted two Culture Crawls to Minneapolis' Karmel Mall, where visitors and Somali vendors came together through food and shared experiences, sparking authentic connections across cultures.
- Alight engaged with local faith & educational groups and welcomed gatherings in its space—from a student newspaper group and a film screening to a visit by UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.
- 77 volunteers contributed 408 hours to welcome newcomers, support cultural celebrations, and strengthen connections across communities.

Customer Success Stories

First Hire, Bright Future: Kimberly's Path to Success

Kimberly arrived in the United States in late 2024 with a high school diploma, a nursing aide certification, and nearly two years of eldercare experience. Eager to work, she faced barriers—limited English, no transportation, and little knowledge of public systems. In early 2025, she joined Alight's Employment & Career Services program, where she learned to navigate transit, apply for jobs, and access supportive services. Multiple Alight teams came together to surround her with care, from housing assistance to employment coaching and community engagement. With guidance, Kimberly attended career fairs, workshops, and interviews tailored to her caregiving background. She borrowed a laptop for English classes, studied at Alight's office with Wi-Fi and snacks, and worked with a bilingual volunteer tutor. Staff provided scrubs, encouragement, and Uber rides to early shifts. Her persistence paid off. In March, Kimberly earned her PCA certification and became the first hire through a new Alight partnership with a local long-term care provider. Today, she supports Spanish-speaking clients and is thriving, proof of what's possible when talent meets opportunity.

Sharing Social Capital Opens Doors: Maria's New Role

When "Maria" arrived from Venezuela through the Welcome Corps, she dreamed of continuing her work as a pastry chef. Despite visiting bakeries and restaurants across the Twin Cities with her sponsors, no opportunities opened up. Then, during a casual conversation between one of her sponsors and a neighbor's dinner guest, Maria's job hunt came up. The dinner guest, a professor at a local university, suggested checking his university's openings, where he thought a prep cook role might have just been posted. Maria applied immediately and was offered the job just hours after her interview. Now, Maria has meaningful work she loves, the university has gained a skilled employee, and a simple neighborly exchange has turned into a life-changing connection. When we collectively share our abundance of knowledge, relationships, and experience, everyone benefits.