



5/15/2023

Ms. Holly Herrera
Bureau of Populations, Refugees and Migration
U.S. Department of State

Dear Ms. Herrera:

As Eau Claire's City Manager, I submit this letter of support for World Relief to open a new affiliate site in Eau Claire.

City staff started collaborating with World Relief of Appleton in March. This collaboration has involved discussions with all stakeholders in the city, including community members, local businesses, the Health Department, the Police Chief, the Department of Human Services, and other government officials. Through these discussions, the benefits of opening a resettlement agency in Eau Claire were highlighted, and all stakeholders announced their support for the initiative. This collaboration represents a significant step forward in creating a more welcoming and inclusive community for all.

Our strategic vision and values emphasize the importance of equity and inclusion, and I believe Eau Claire is well-suited to not only receive refugees, but to help them thrive.

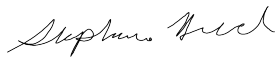
Local employment opportunities play a critical role in enabling refugees to become self-sufficient and integrate into the community. According to the latest available data from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, as of June 2021, the unemployment rate in Eau Claire County was 3.5%, which was slightly lower than the statewide unemployment rate of 3.6%. The largest industry in Eau Claire is healthcare, followed by retail trade and manufacturing. The city also has a significant education sector, with several colleges and universities located in the area. Overall, Eau Claire has a diverse economy with various employment opportunities across different sectors.

Community support is also essential in providing a welcoming environment for refugees and helping them adjust to their new surroundings. State programs, such as language training and job placement services, are instrumental in assisting refugees in finding employment and becoming economically independent. Eau Claire has a long history of welcoming refugees and supporting them as they resettle in the area. The community has several organizations and programs in place to provide support to refugees, including the Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, the Hmong Mutual Association, the Eau Claire Area School District's English Language Learner program, and the Western Dairyland Economic Opportunity Council. These organizations provide services such as housing assistance, language classes, job training, and cultural orientation to help refugees adapt to their new surroundings and become self-sufficient. Additionally, the local community has shown a strong

commitment to supporting refugees, with many individuals and organizations volunteering their time and resources to help newcomers feel welcome. For example, the "Refugee Support Fund" was established by a local resident to help refugees pay for basic necessities such as rent and utilities. Overall, the community support for refugees in Eau Claire is significant, with many organizations and individuals working together to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for newcomers.

Eau Claire believes that welcoming refugees takes a collective effort. We take pride in resettling refugees from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds, and we look for opportunities to build long-term community connection and successful integration for our new neighbors. It is clear from World Relief's work in other locations that they will be a strong partner with us in these efforts, as they provide high quality services to help refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency and integration in their local communities. For all these reasons, we support their proposal to open a new office in Eau Claire.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stephanie Hirsch".

Stephanie Hirsch
City Manager