



To the Friends & Stakeholders of Open Arms...

Thomas Dunn, OA Board Member

God first opened my eyes to the cause of the immigrant nearly 25 years ago during a Mennonite Central Committee Learning & Service Trip. As our youth group traveled around Guatemala, I was confronted with the disparities that exist in our world and I felt convicted to live life differently when I returned to Ohio. This sense of conviction has changed my life in many ways, but one specific result was it led to me joining the Open Arms board soon after I graduated from college. Back in the early 2000's Open Arms was a much smaller organization, but the same passion to welcome the immigrants was still the motivating force of the ministry. I enjoyed my tenure as a board member and continued to support and keep in touch with Open Arms after I cycled off the board.

Around 2016, I met Rollin Mukanza for the first time. Rollin had reached out to Ohio Conference Mennonite to see if it could relate to a growing Congolese refugee community in Akron. Ohio Conference



then contacted me to see if I could be the point person for this relationship and Rollin and I have been working together since then. As I got to know Rollin it was clear that God had given him the gifts and the calling to serve the immigrant community of Akron in general and the Congolese refugee community in specific. This was the same passion and calling that I see in Pablo Delgado and in Raul Tadeo and Haroldo Nunes before him. It seemed like a logical step to inquire of Open Arms if they would be open to empowering Rollin to work as a full time Christian worker to welcome, empower and support the immigrant community in Akron.

I am grateful the Open Arms board decided to say yes to this opportunity and invited me back onto the board. I am excited to see what God has in store in Akron, in Wayne county and wherever God is calling us to welcome the stranger in our midst!

Seneca Bowers, Educational Coordinator

For the students involved in Open Arms' programs, the year culminates with a celebration of the Christmas season. This year, we hosted a party at Living Water Church in Dalton with 50 attendees, including students from five different area schools. The day was filled with so much joy for the students and volunteers alike, as they went through different activities of crafts and games. Between making paper snowflakes, decorating Christmas cookies, candy cane tosses, and pin the nose on Rudolph, the kids were busy all day. If you were to ask the younger kids what their favorite portion of the day was, I think almost everyone would agree on the fake snowball fight they got to have indoors with giant cotton ball toys.



For the last couple years, this addition to the celebration has been a good time for the younger and older kids alike (as well as a few volunteers!). The older students were able to express their creativity by decorating home-made snowy Christmas trees made out of pinecones. Each group had their own activity that taught the students about the Christmas story in a hands-on manner. It was truly a special moment to watch the kids be so engaged in these activities, while also getting to spend time surrounded by their friends. The volunteers that were able to join us for this event were so generous with giving their time so joyfully.



For me, this event is an unforgettable reminder of the impact Open Arms and our volunteers make on the lives of the families involved. Seeing the children smiling and so happy throughout our time together warms my heart. Their personalities really shine through in an event where they can be surrounded by friends and people who are there to invest in them.

Pablo Delgado, OA Executive Director

The Bible has many stories about immigration: the journeys of Abraham and how the Lord asked him to go from Ur to the land of the Chaldeans; Joseph sold as a slave to Egypt, for God's plan; Moses fled Egypt and lived in Midian to set the people of Israel free; Ruth who moved to Israel to fulfill the Lord's promises becoming an ancestor of King David.

In last few weeks, the community we serve has felt anxious and overwhelmed, when they hear words like "massive deportation" and "new immigration policies" but the Word of God highlights the importance of kindness and inclusion, illustrating how embracing outsiders can lead to blessings and transformation for all involved.

Open Arms will continue to do everything we have always done, everything we possibly can to support our brothers and sisters: hard-working families looking to improve the lives of their kids.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and Romans 13:1-5 show that the Lord not only calls us to be subject to the governing authorities but He also wants His people to care for the foreigner. God wants us to be people of justice and mercy.

These times are an opportunity for the Christian community to focus on welcoming and caring for immigrants, as we believe all people are created in God's image and deserve dignity and compassion; and for the immigrant community to show their resilience and faith in God.

Please continue to pray and support our mission. God bless you!

Interview with Claudia

Name & Image have been changed to protect her identity

Question: How has your experience been with Open Arms?

Answer: I am grateful to this organization from the bottom of my heart. You have helped us so much! If it were not for you, I don't know where I would be.

This is a really great organization that is doing God's work. They have helped us with everything from rides, to finding us needed furniture, clothes for my child, even assisted me with my rent once. I want to say thank you to Pablo, Seneca, and Jennifer for helping me without asking anything of me or requiring any-



Open Arms Akron

Rollin Mukanza, Community Development Leader

I spent most of last month working with Congolese clients on their refugee immigration status. Most of the clients with outstanding status that they procrastinated on are trying to push for the finish line because of the elections in November. I



received many calls and referrals related to the status change of clients. The majority of organizations and agencies dealing with our immigrant clients are overwhelmed, scheduling immigration appointments presently is a great challenge. Most of our clients have their legal refugee status but regardless of legal status, they remain very anxious.

I also assisted clients with navigation of resources such as

public benefits, and distribution of warm clothes and diapers. I continued to schedule and provide transportation to medical appointments to our clients, as it is always a need. .

I also spent part of the last month working with Akron Swahili Mennonite Church leading in conflict resolution, hope and healing training with church leadership. I involved MCC IVEPER Elvis Otiedo in this training in preparation for his second program term in Akron. Open Arms Akron is planning on working closer with Elvis for youth ministry programs development with the Swahili church.

Open Arms Akron participated in the planning of January 26th Combine church service that will take place at Wooster Mennonite church.



Ways to Support our Ministry:

Mail checks to:

Open Arms
1305 W Market St
Orrville, OH 44667

Online: Visit our website:
open-arms.us/donate



**Mark your calendars
for our Open Arms
Fundraiser Banquet!**

**March 27th @ 6:00pm
at Kidron Community
Center (Kidron Park)**

Phone: 330-765-9955 | Email: info@open-arms.us | Website: open-arms.us



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