

Soccer camp helps kids feel at home in U.S.

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Image 1. Quriesh Ahmad, 10, from Afghanistan, practices during a soccer camp for refugee children at Total Soccer Arena in Landover, Maryland. Photo by Washington Post/ Carolyn Van Houten

In Maryland, some kids played a soccer game. They spoke in many languages.

All of the kids are refugees. Refugees are people who have to leave their home countries. They need to get away from danger. These kids were in a soccer camp for refugees. They got to meet other kids who also started over in the United States. The campers did not just play soccer. They also learned about life.

Hard Times

The camp is run by a group called LACES. The name means Life and Change Experienced Thru Sports. They use soccer to bring people together. Many of these people have gone through hard times.

Seren Fryatt is from Illinois. She started LACES. She started it in 2015. She got the idea while playing on a women's soccer team. She was playing in Liberia. Her teammates' lives were hard. Still, soccer made them happy. Liberia is a country in Africa. There has been fighting in Liberia for 14 years.

The camp coaches work for free. People give money to cover costs. This year, 95 kids signed up.



Learning From Each Other

Louisa Pitney is one of the coaches. She likes seeing the kids grow just from being together. They learn many things from each other.

Two cousins went to LACES camp together. They are Quriesh Ahmad and Monir Rasooli. They are both 10 years old. The cousins are from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country in the Middle East. There has been a lot of fighting there. "But when I come here, I am safe," Monir said.

Before moving to Maryland, the cousins did not play soccer. Now, it is the biggest part of their American lives.

Lara Karagholi is a camper there. She is 10 years old. She used to play soccer in Iraq. Iraq is also in the Middle East. She moved to the United States four years ago. At first, she had a hard time. Now, she is happy. She likes playing soccer. She likes making new friends.

At the end of camp, the kids gathered to talk. They talked about what they had learned. A coach called on one quiet girl. She smiled before answering.

"Celebrate each other," she said.