

EAST METRO INTERNATIONAL;

Apartment owners asked to help immigrants

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Body

The world map in apartment manager Bob Speer's office is dotted with nearly 100 pushpins. Each marks the home turf of tenants who live in Shallowford Gardens, a DeKalb County complex where more than 400 Hispanic, Vietnamese, Chinese and Indian natives now make their home.

"We have a very low turnover rate here," Speer said. "The reason is, we go the extra mile to get to know our tenants and to help them adjust to life in America. They are very grateful and the complex is very stable as a result."

Every year, about 3,000 refugees resettle in Georgia, most of them in metro Atlanta, according to World Relief, a nonprofit resettlement agency.

The Atlanta Project is working with World Relief to spread the word about Shallowford Gardens. They plan to meet with owners and managers of other complexes and urge them to follow the Gardens' path to help tenants.

"Shallowford Gardens is an evergreen model that can be applied to any group of residents in an apartment complex," said Don Payton, assistant coordinator of TAP's Central DeKalb Cluster. Yet more than any other group, he said, immigrants and refugees who cannot speak English need assistance because they are hindered by language and cultural barriers.

Payton and others want to persuade local apartment owners to provide meeting space for nonprofit and public agencies.

"There are many organizations willing to help immigrants and refugees that don't have money to rent space," said Michael Burnham, youth services director at World Relief. "A good-sized room on the ground floor or a small apartment is all an organization needs to be able to come in and teach English, hold health workshops, do employment training or conduct an after-school program."

Shallowford Gardens not only makes space available free for social services volunteers, but also conducts its own programs.

But other complexes don't have to conduct their own programs, they just need to free up space for others to do it, Speer said.

Grant Park Apartments in east Atlanta provides space for Catholic Social Services and St. Joseph's Hospital to provide numerous services to foreign-born residents. The 302-unit complex was awarded a \$ 9.4 million renovation grant in June through a partnership agreement between the city of Atlanta, Fleet Finance and NationsBank.

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"Not speaking English hurts foreign-born tenants the most," said Et Ambrosio, who manages St. Joseph's Mercy Mobile Health Care office at Grant Park **Apartments**. "To me, Atlanta has an amazing number of Hispanics, Koreans and Vietnamese. I don't know why a city the size of Atlanta doesn't have more nighttime schools to teach these people English. What English classes are taught to adults here are taught by volunteers on a part-time basis."

For more information on outreach to **immigrant** and refugee services in Atlanta, call Don Payton at 296-4085.

Graphic

Photo: Kathleen Brannan, a volunteer with the Chamblee-Doraville Ministry Center, **helps** To Ngoc, 12, with her homework at the Shallowford Gardens **apartment** complex's community center / JEAN SHIFRIN / Staff

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