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Opinion: Helping more refugees thrive in Michigan

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In his Instagram photos, Nedal is always smiling.

That's because the young father from Syria, who was granted asylum and immigrated to America in 2015, no longer fears for his children's safety, or for his life. Memories of torture and jail, dead bodies along the roadside, bombed by government forces, recede from view as he and his small family build new memories: of education, of entrepreneurship, of friendships and celebrations, of dreams coming true and a lifetime of possibilities in America.

The current number of refugees approved for admittance in 2018 is 45,000. In comparison, in 2017, 96,874 refugees came to America, with five percent (5,039 people) settling in Michigan. As Michigan's largest provider of refugee services, Samaritas sees the long-term positive impact of refugees on our communities as profound, and

incredibly valuable. We give people in desperate, dangerous situations freedom and safety, and in return, they give us hard work, humility, dedication and the kind of effort that builds local economies and communities in great measure.

Against a backdrop of decreased numbers of refugees being admitted to America this year, and perhaps less in the year ahead, we believe it is essential, and consistent with our American heritage, to address and meet the desperate needs of refugees to the greatest extent possible. To that need, we advocate for the opportunity to welcome and serve more refugees in America at this time and going forward.

Globally, we are experiencing the highest levels of displacement on record, with 68.5 million people around the world forced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. That's an increase of 2.9 million people from the previous year.

Remarkably, 25.4 million refugees in the world are children.

Refugees and immigrants who have sought freedom and opportunity in our land have blessed America immeasurably. They have devoted their lives to creating a future for themselves and their families, and engaging with and supporting their communities. Refugees are statistically more likely to become entrepreneurs, as they are fighters, survivors, beyond all odds. They are also patriotic citizens, displaying American flags outside their homes and celebrating American holidays with pride, so grateful to get a second chance here.

Even more than the vast economic contributions and loyalty to our country, there is a strong humanitarian imperative to welcoming the downtrodden, the disenfranchised and endangered that must not be ignored.

We know who we are as a nation in part by the way we welcome the stranger. Long a biblical imperative, we live by a mandate to help refugees rise up, to help them meet their fullest potential and do all we can to bring them hope and a future.

Proposals for 2019 are being reviewed right now, with proposed limits ranging between 25,000 and 45,000. It is important to advocate to increase the number of refugees accepted to the United States to respond to the humanitarian crisis the world is currently facing.

In Michigan, Samaritas has resettled refugees since World War II. Our communities welcome New Americans with open arms. Through housing assistance, job training, English classes, counseling and cultural assimilation efforts, we guide New Americans to become contributing citizens who in turn welcome others and keep the generosity of spirit going.

Sam Beals is CEO of Samaritas, Michigan's largest provider of refugee resettlement.