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\$50,000 grant will fund expansion of Aurora's Natural Helpers program for immigrants and refugees

AURORA, Colo. – The city of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs has received a \$50,000 grant from the Colorado Health Foundation for the successful Aurora Natural Helpers program, which trains immigrants and refugees to be leaders in their communities.

The nationally recognized Natural Helpers program was brought to Aurora by the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs in 2016 in response to the city's Comprehensive Strategic Plan to expand programs for integration of refugees and immigrants. The program's goal is to identify, train and empower local immigrants and refugees who understand the challenges of moving to a different place, learning a new language and establishing a home in the U.S. They are then able to connect immigrants and refugees in their own communities with resources and opportunities to better integrate into the city.

The \$50,000, one-time grant from the Colorado Health Foundation will allow Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs to expand Natural Helpers in 2017-18. Natural Helpers is administered jointly by the city and the Village Exchange Center, a nonprofit organization at 1609 Havana St. dedicated to serving immigrants and refugees in the Aurora/Denver area through a community center, multi-faith worship space, co-located programs, informational services and cultural activities.

During the grant year, organizers will lead Natural Helper trainings for two groups of 15 to 20 adults. Additionally, a Natural Helper youth curriculum will be developed, and an additional training will be held for 15 youth. The funding will also provide leadership development and cross-cultural training to immigrant and refugee leaders.

"The city of Aurora has seen great successes with Natural Helpers in the past year, and the program's graduates are already making a big difference with our immigrant and refugee communities, making them feel safe, welcome and part of this city," said Ricardo Gambetta, head of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. "We want to thank the Colorado Health Foundation for recognizing the value of this program and investing in the promise of all of our residents."

"It is an honor to partner with Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs on this important program for our refugees and immigrants," said Amanda Blaurock, executive director of the Village Exchange Center. "I echo Mr. Gambetta's gratitude to the Colorado Health Foundation for its recognition and empowerment of both the Natural Helpers program and our Youth Wellness Program."

The Aurora Natural Helpers program was recognized by the Denver Regional Council of Governments with the 2017 Metro Vision Award.

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