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New Hampshire Refugee Resettlement:

A Community Integration Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to examine refugee resettlement programs in New Hampshire and to explore best practices that can be beneficial to refugees and their host communities. We first provide a brief overview of the status of refugees and the role of the federal and state government in funding programs available to refugees in New Hampshire. We then explore key topics that present particular policy challenges to the New Hampshire refugee community as identified by Barbara Seebart, the state refugee coordinator. These issues include employment and job progression, refugee transportation, mental health, and civic engagement. The academic research and best practices of other states illustrate the benefits of increasing the role that municipal governments and the surrounding community could play in overcoming obstacles that refugees face in New Hampshire.

1. OVERVIEW OF REFUGEES IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

1.1 Profile of Refugees in New Hampshire

Historically, the United States has admitted refugees from across the world for special humanitarian concerns, particularly to provide individuals with a safe haven from oppression or persecution faced in their home countries. Since 1975, the United States resettled approximately 2.6 million refugees, and after the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, annual admissions figures ranged from 27,100 (2002) to 207,116 (1980).¹ Though New Hampshire has not been a primary site for resettlement, between 1997-2009, 5,413 refugees were placed in the state. Resettlement in New Hampshire has begun to taper with 521 refugees resettling in 2008, 561 in 2009, 536 in 2010, and 522 in 2011. Previously, many of New Hampshire's refugees came from countries within the Soviet Union and from countries affected by genocide, like Bosnia and the Sudan. More recent refugees arrive from Bhutan and Iraq with few from Europe. Many of these refugees settle in the larger cities within the state, namely Manchester and Concord.²

1.2 Profile of Refugee Programs Funding in New Hampshire

Refugee programs in New Hampshire are funded entirely through the United States Health and Human Services, the Administration of Children and Families, and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Funding is obtained and eventually distributed based on ORR regulations. ORR allocates funding to individual states through three types of grants: formula, discretionary, and matching. Formula grants are given to states based on a predetermined formula that accounts for the number of refugees residing in a state as established in the Refugee Act of 1980.³ Discretionary grants are also available to different stakeholders and individual programs for special projects. ORR bases the amount of these grants on availability of funds and the strength of the program's application.⁴ Finally, ORR's grant matching program provides two dollars for every dollar raised by a private non-profit agency operating the state. As a result of this funding system, which is a combination of a pre-determined allocation to states combined



with a competitive grant process, states receive far different amounts of funding. In FY 2010, New Hampshire received \$1,520,000 in formula grants, \$210,000 in state administered discretionary grants, and \$510,400 in matching grants.^{5 6} In FY 2011, formulaic grant funding decreased to \$1,038,794 while state administered discretionary grants and matching grants increased to \$425,000 and \$666,000 respectively.

FORMULA GRANTS FY 2011

Service Provider	Cash and Medical Assistance	Refugee Social Services Program	Targeted Assistance Program	TOTAL FY 2011
Grant Received	\$590,000	\$448,794	N/A	\$1,038,794

* Source: ORR Data FY 2011

DISCRETIONARY GRANTS FY 2011

Service Providers	Cuban - Haitian Program	Refugee Preventive Health Program	Refugee School Impact	Services to Older Refugees Program	Targeted Assistance - Discretionary	TOTAL FY 2011
Grant Received	N/A	\$100,000	\$175,000	N/A	\$150,000	\$425,000

* Source: ORR Data FY 2011

MATCHING GRANTS FY 2011

Matching VOLAG Grantee	New Hampshire Affiliate Name	Projected ORR Matching Grant Funding
Episcopal Migration Ministries	Lutheran Social Services of New England	\$103,400
Church World Service	Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Program	\$74,800
US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants	International Institute of New Hampshire	\$290,400
Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services	Lutheran Social Services of New England	\$198,000
TOTAL FY 2011		\$666,600

* Source: ORR Data FY 2011

1.3 Overview of Refugee Resettlement Process in New Hampshire



The United Nations interviews individuals to help determine whether or not they will qualify as refugees. Only those who can prove they are escaping persecution and are unable to return to their home country are eligible for resettlement. Should a refugee ask to be resettled in the United States, they are interviewed by US Refugee Program officials from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services to determine whether or not they meet eligibility requirements, which are often stricter than those of the United Nations.⁷

Refugees accepted into the United States are given a health screening and cultural orientation and provided with a travel loan, agreeing to pay back the costs of the flight. The profiles of accepted refugees are sent to the Refugee Processing Center, where National Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) meet weekly to obtain caseloads and prepare for allocation to their affiliate networks located around the country. These affiliate agencies then accept and assume responsibility for the refugee case. Affiliates are provided with funds from the United States State Department and are charged with providing refugees core services and basic needs support. These include housing, case management, community orientation, social security, job-related transportation, and a network to seek referrals for schools, English courses, job services or health assessment. The reception and placement period lasts approximately 30-90 days from the time of arrival. In New Hampshire, there are two VOLAGS: Lutheran Social Services and the International Institute.⁸

After this period expires, refugees use services provided by the New Hampshire Office of Refugee Resettlement (NHORR) headed by Barbara Seebart, the state refugee coordinator, and Linda Zollo, the state refugee health coordinator. The federal government funds 100 percent of the NHORR services. The NHORR helps refugees achieve self-sufficiency by focusing on learning English and finding employment. Refugees receive assistance through social services grants, school impact grants, preventive health grants, targeted assistance grants, and refugee cash and medical assistance. The matching grants last for six months after the initial 90-day period and the cash assistance lasts for eight months. After this period has expired, refugees are eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds for an additional 52 months after cash assistance expires.⁹

1.4 Refugee Integration Framework

Refugee integration is a complex and dynamic process for both refugees and host communities. Grant-makers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, a nonprofit organization that provides grants to organizations that work with immigrants and refugees, has developed a framework for understanding integration and the best practices that can lead to full integration. GLCIR points out that global migration is a growing trend that is leading to more diverse communities and that immigrants are becoming increasingly vital to the function of the U.S. labor market and overall economy. It makes the case that, through proper integration of refugees and immigrants, communities can grow both socially and economically. A more diverse population adds vibrancy to the



community and encourages economic growth and competitiveness through labor, revenue from taxes, and refugees' entrepreneurship. GLCIR recommends that opportunities exist for refugees to participate in and interact with the wider community without losing their own cultural identity, learning English while maintaining their native languages, and serving as productive members of the community through their employment and civic engagement. It further recommends that host communities systematically engage newcomers in community planning efforts, offer quality English classes and equitable access to quality education, provide services that support self-sufficiency such as job training and entrepreneurship support and enact laws that promote equal treatment and opportunity.¹⁰ The framework focuses on three overarching goals that must be kept in mind when considering policy options and programs for integrating refugees: sensitivity to a refugee's cultural background and context, fostering independence and self-sufficiency in refugees, and building structures and institutions in the wider community that support integration.

First among the three key goals of any refugee integration program is cultural sensitivity. Refugees often arrive with little understanding of American customs, culture, or language. They come from a wide variety of cultural and experiential contexts. Therefore, literature on refugee resettlement has consistently emphasized the necessity of expressing sensitivity toward and working within the refugees' own cultural norms and experiences when offering health care, job training, or other services rather than simply having a generic program designed for all refugees.¹¹ In addition, while short-term supports may be necessary during the initial resettlement period, an effective refugee integration program should focus on giving refugees the skills and resources to survive and thrive independently so that they can function self-sufficiently within their community rather than merely depending on it for support. As the literature demonstrates, this is essential for both the refugee and the larger community, as it allows refugees to become active, productive members who make positive contributions to their community through their work, taxes, and civic engagement.^{12 13 14} Finally, an initiative to help refugees cannot merely focus on the refugee in isolation; it also must focus on creating community institutions that support integration. This means actively engaging established institutions such as businesses, schools, religious institutions, and landlords in the process of refugee integration, as well as making sure that community institutions are well-suited to meet the unique needs of refugees (for example, ensuring that refugee housing units are located in a such a way as to provide easy transportation to jobs and English classes).^{15 16 17}

1.5 Objectives of the Paper

The primary goal of New Hampshire's Refugee Program is to assist refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment upon arrival in the United States. To this end, the state and private non-profits provide a number of services to refugees in the first eight months of residency in the United States, including finding a home and initial employment, and learning English. However, these services are not comprehensive in



attending to all the needs of refugees in the state. Barbara Seebart of the Office of Minority Health identified the four primary challenges that resettled refugees face in New Hampshire: 1) moving past the level of initial employment; 2) finding adequate, reliable transportation, particularly in the Winter months, 3) dealing with mental health issues, and 4) becoming active citizens. The purpose of this paper is to explore the programs currently offered in these four areas, and to incorporate academic research and best practices from other states to develop policy options for New Hampshire that can expand the quality of its refugee resettlement programs.

This paper is organized in four sections focusing on each issue identified above. Each section focuses on the available academic literature and then highlights a number of case studies of practices in other states. The paper also aims to provide an overview of options that New Hampshire could explore as a means of improving refugee self-sufficiency and social adjustment.

2. OVERVIEW OF RESETTLEMENT TOPICS

2.1 *Employment and Job Progression*

2.1.1 *Overview of Refugee Employment and Job Progression in New Hampshire*

Employment is an essential aspect of self-sustainability and integration for refugees. Employment allows refugees to reduce their economic burden, support themselves primarily through their own income and contribute to the community through their work. Employment opportunity programs in New Hampshire currently include an assessment of vocational skills, job development, job placement, and follow up services with local employers provided by non-profit organizations.

In New Hampshire, refugees are paired with a job developer who is responsible for providing employment orientation, identifying potential jobs for refugees, accompanying refugees to job interviews, and helping refugees to locate transportation. A number of organizations in New Hampshire offer specialized employment services:

- The Somali Development Center located in Manchester, New Hampshire offers services, including employment assistance, to Somali refugees.¹⁸
- Southern New Hampshire Services has developed the Refugee Farmers Program, where refugees have worked since 2007 on farming a seven-acre plot in Dunbarton, New Hampshire and will begin to sell their produce at local markets in the summer of 2012.¹⁹
- The International Institute of New Hampshire provides two primary employment services: a Business Development Program, which provides refugees with business coaches to advise them in employment prospects as well as small business ventures,²⁰ and a Hospitality Training Program, which “delivers skills



training and job placement assistance to individuals pursuing hospitality industry employment.”²¹

- Lutheran Social Services also works closely with refugees to help them find and secure employment. Job developers at Lutheran Social Services assist each employable refugee by first providing an orientation to employment in the United States. Then, they work to identify possible jobs, help schedule interviews, and arrange transportation to and from interviews and training programs. The primary function of a job developer is to place refugees in jobs with wages and benefits above minimum wage, if possible.²²

These types of services have become even more crucial while refugees deal with the impact of an economic recession in the US job market, which has been marked by high unemployment for native, English-speaking citizens. A study by Church World Service suggests that the impact of increased unemployment on refugees has been twofold: layoffs for previously employed, settled refugees and an increase in the time elapsing from arrival of a new refugee to when he or she finds employment. This has led Church World Service to conclude that, “the 180-day goal of employment is unrealistic for refugees in today's economic climate.”²³ In 2011, the New Hampshire refugee job placement rate is approximately 81 percent.²⁴ However, refugees in the state struggle with underemployment or being overqualified, which usually translates not only to lower wages and harder working conditions, but also to jobs that are often more susceptible to layoffs and fluctuations in the economy, magnifying the impact of the recent recession on struggling refugee communities.

2.1.2 Academic Literature on Refugee Employment and Job Progression

A study conducted by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) in which 76 New Hampshire refugees were interviewed, revealed that the majority of the refugees (78 percent), were able to find and maintain jobs. However, these jobs are often unskilled, low paying jobs: “refugees often fill jobs that are classified as unskilled and are considered undesirable because of temperature extreme, difficult physical labor, or risk of physical assault.”²⁵ Immigrant employment trends suggest that a disproportionate share of immigrants and refugees work in low-wage jobs. While approximately 12 percent of the US population is composed of immigrants, immigrants make up over 21 percent of the low-wage employment force.²⁶

Many refugees come to the United States with prior education, but still find themselves earning wages below their skill levels. A study conducted by the Migration Policy Institute found that 24 percent of foreign-born, noncitizens with at least a bachelor's degree earn less than \$19,800 annually, as opposed to 7.6 percent of their American counterparts. Many of the refugees interviewed in the UNH study were educated as “lawyers, physicians, and mechanical engineers” and had experienced “job downgrading” since coming to the US.²⁷ A study analyzing resettlement of Bosnian refugees in the United States proposed four policy conclusions, the third of which was “a credible



national body is needed to evaluate refugee credential upon arrival.”²⁸ Thus, a significant opportunity exists in the untapped skills of refugees that could increase the relative productivity level of the refugee community.

2.1.3 Programs Available in Other States

As discussed above, New Hampshire programs work to help refugees reach self-sufficiency and give back to their communities through productive employment. In some cases, these programs are geared towards specific refugee groups. However, organizations do not need to be ethnicity-specific to be culturally sensitive and aware of a refugee’s unique needs. Many successful organizations elsewhere throughout the United States have taken advantage of community support to help facilitate the process of refugee resettlement and employment. These programs also exist in New Hampshire, specifically those offered by the Southern New Hampshire Services’ Refugee Farmers Program. These programs demonstrate the principle of community integration and the often untapped benefits local communities offer in support of refugee employment programs.

Common program structures include one-on-one advising as well as larger classes or training seminars, both focusing on educating the refugee about possible employment opportunities and job acquisition skills, such as resume building and interviewing. An example of the latter is the New Mainers Refugee Workforce Development Project. This provides a seven week training program focusing on “on-the-job English, US workplace culture, and job search skills” at the end of which, “graduates receive a certificate which on the back lists twelve areas of employability competencies and an assessment of the student’s individual mastery of each area.”²⁹ A 2012 assessment of the Vocational ESOL program found an 89 percent completion rate of enrolled refugees. Ninety five percent of the refugees who completed the training program found employment within 60 days of the program’s completion, with an average wage of \$1.91 greater than the state minimum wage of \$7.50. In addition the project offers Work Readiness & Computer Literacy Workshops, which provide refugees with a concentrated session of education in work place and computer skills. For the 99 percent of the invited refugees who completed the workshop, over 31 percent were then placed in jobs by a Job Developer with wages of \$10.10, \$2.60 above the minimum wage.³⁰

The International Institute of Minnesota (IIM) has developed a similar program to provide refugees with skills necessary to become nurses and train for other medical careers. IIM has three separate programs for advancement in medical careers. Each program offers targeted assistance for refugees at different stages in their careers in the health care industry:

Nursing Assistant Training: Students receive extensive training and clinical instruction to become nursing assistants, with an added emphasis on cross-cultural practices. The program has a pass rate for the Maine certification exam of 98



percent for graduated students, who then enter the workforce at an average wage of \$10.50 to \$11.00.³¹

- **College Readiness for Medical Careers:** This program is “an academic English language program for New Americans who are employed in or interested in an advanced career in the medical field” designed to prepare participants for college level work and advanced medical degrees. Often participants include graduates of the Nursing Assistant Training program who want to pursue further education and careers through obtaining college degrees.³²
- **Medical Career Advancement:** This program provides one-on-one career and financial counseling along with tutoring, language education, and workforce training to help refugees continue their education and advance their medical careers.³³

The Global Farms program offered by the International Institute of St. Louis uses its farming program both as an employment prospect for refugees and a source of job training for more advanced careers in agriculture. Expansion of the Southern New Hampshire Services’ Refugee Farmers Program could offer similar education opportunities and thus graduate refugees from the program and increase the its reach. With the job training aspect of Global Farms, the International Institute’s program is able to take in up to forty new participants every year.³⁴

One concept that has proved fruitful in a number of other refugee resettlement programs is the practice of developing subsidized relationships with companies to fill positions with refugees. An example of this is in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where EXEL Logistics has maintained a working relationship with local resettlement agencies and has filled entry-level positions with resettled refugees. This program has created a mutually beneficial relationship between the refugees who gain employment and the company that receives a diverse and motivated workforce.³⁵ Formal, standing relationships with local companies can be incentivized through subsidy programs funded by the state. A number of differently structured incentive programs already exist for hiring refugees and other special assistance groups. The following options demonstrate the most common forms of employment subsidies:

- **Tax incentives:** Tax breaks to companies according to the number of refugees employed. The federal government offers tax breaks in the form of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for companies that hire members of designated groups, which include refugees as well as groups such as veterans and workers with disabilities.³⁶
- **Municipal Contracts:** A percentage of state and city contracts can be allocated to companies that maintain a certain level of refugee employment. Many cities have similar policies for minority and women owned business. Tactics like this have been effective for various other state initiatives such as Maryland’s Minority and



Women-Owned Business Initiative (MBE) which designates a certain percentage of state government contracts that must go to minority or women-owned business.³⁷

- Cash payments: Direct cash transfers can be made from state governments to companies that hire refugees according to the number of refugees employed. The Job Start program in Alaska pays companies the maximum assistance package that would be received by an unemployed refugee provided the employer pays all standard taxes and at least the state minimum wage of \$7.75 an hour.³⁸

2.2 Transportation

2.2.1 Overview of Refugee Transportation in New Hampshire

Transportation is an important dimension of resettlement, especially in New Hampshire. The State's rural landscape and seasonal weather patterns require residents to rely heavily on transportation throughout the year. Refugees, who typically cannot afford their own car are dependent on public transportation or other services provided within their community. This places a significant financial burden on these already overwhelmed individuals. Currently, a comprehensive public transportation system does not exist throughout the state. However, refugees in Manchester, Laconia, Concord, and Nashua, the four largest resettlement communities, have access to local transportation systems.³⁹ Upon arrival, refugees are paired with a job developer who helps refugees navigate these public transportation systems and informs them about other modes of transportation.

In the 2007 University of New Hampshire study on the state's refugees and resettlement programs, many of the refugees interviewed reported facing difficulty with transportation.⁴⁰ However, their research revealed that it was not access to public transportation that caused this difficulty, but rather efficiency. The majority of refugees interviewed in the study reported choosing to buy a car, or carpool, despite having access to public transportation.⁴¹ Even though many of the refugees could not afford a car, they felt the purchase was necessary. In order to go to work, go to the grocery store, and attend other refugee resettlement programs, they needed to have their own car, the purchase of which presents a significant cost burden to the refugee in the form of purchase price and the cost of upkeep, gas, and required liability insurance.⁴² However, many see it as necessary as refugees cannot use the public bus system because stop locations and schedules did not coincide with their needs.⁴³ The UNH study identified a structural component of the refugee resettlement program which exacerbates these transportation obstacles. Currently in the United States, the federal resettlement program requires refugees to accept their first job offer, regardless of location.⁴⁴ Thus, many refugees are placed in housing far from their jobs and the resettlement program classes, such as ESL.

Currently, several programs and non-profit organizations operate in New Hampshire that work to alleviate the large finance burden born on those refugees and low income



individuals purchasing a car and those who can not find access to reliable public transportation. These programs include:

- **More Than Wheels:** More Than Wheels is a non-profit that helps low-income individuals and families secure loans and lines of credit to finance the purchase of a reliable and fuel-efficient car at low interest rates. They also work with these individuals to ensure that they are covered with bumper-to-bumper warranty coverage.⁴⁵
- **Good New Garage:** The Good News Garage is a program of the Lutheran Social Services that works to repair donated cars to provide them to low-income individuals and families in need throughout New England. They have provided over 4,000 cars since the program began in 1996.⁴⁶ In New Hampshire, in order to receive a car, an individual must be participating in an approved job or vocational training process and not have a vehicle in their household or access to transportation.⁴⁷
- **Lutheran Social Services of New England** also works to arrange transportation for individuals enrolled in their resettlement program to and from job interviews and job and vocational training.⁴⁸

Refugees that cannot afford a car and are unable to utilize public transportation may apply for transportation services provided through TANF. Financial Assistance for Needy Families (FANF), is the New Hampshire counterpart of TANF and provides services to refugees admitted under section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.⁴⁹ Refugees may receive reimbursement for transportation to and from their place of work. Transportation provided by “private agencies under contract with the NH department of transportation, the United States department of transportation, or registered common carriers under RSA 37” is also provided through FANF funding.⁵⁰

2.2.2 Academic Literature on Refugee Transportation

Academic research suggests that transportation is a key component of resettlement. Transportation plays a more significant role in determining the success of resettlement in geographic areas where transportation is required for daily necessities, such as driving to work, going to the grocery store, and seeking health care. A study in Vermont concluded that refugees with access to transportation are more likely to improve their employment status, receive necessary medical care, and access other goods and services that promoted survival and good mental health.⁵¹ Transportation is also required for refugees to attend many of the other resettlement programs. Programs are unlikely to be successful if refugees cannot reach their destinations. A recent study also found that refugees with inadequate transportation are less likely to integrate into their communities.⁵² When refugees do not integrate with their communities they become isolated and more susceptible to serious mental health problems.⁵³



2.2.3 Programs Available in Other States

Similar to New Hampshire, refugees in communities across the nation suffer from a lack of comprehensive efficient transportation. In general, refugees located in rural areas are more adversely affected by the inefficiency of public transportation. Therefore, refugees in other states are similarly dependent on the services provided in their local communities. Services in other states include: volunteer drivers for refugees, lessons on how to use public transportation, and information on how to obtain a driver's license, which can be found in various communities in New Hampshire. Some states have developed initiatives to accommodate refugees' lack of transportation. One example is the Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts. This group offers free individualized ESL tutoring programs and has located their offices on public transit lines to make them accessible to refugees without other means of transportation.⁵⁴ Another example is in Charlottesville, Virginia where the Department of Social Services has established a pilot program to offer 24/7 emergency transportation. This ensures that if refugees or other low-income workers' cars break down, they can access rides to where they need to go.⁵⁵

2.3 Mental Health

2.3.1 Overview of Refugee Mental Health in New Hampshire

Currently, there is no statewide program that specifically addresses mental health issues for refugees. However, all refugees have access to two health care services provided by The New Hampshire Office of Refugee Resettlement. Within the first 30 days, the office provides each refugee with a preliminary health screening.⁵⁶ The preliminary screening includes a general health assessment, immunization updates, active and latent tuberculosis testing, and lead and anemia screenings for children.⁵⁷ The office also provides cash assistance to refugees who cannot afford health care. The monetary stipend refugees receive is consistent with TANF payments. These programs are funded by the Medical and Cash Assistance Program grant: a reimbursement grant issued by the ORR.⁵⁸ As mentioned earlier, formula grants are given to states based on a predetermined formula that takes into account the number of refugees residing in a state as established in the Refugee Act of 1980.⁵⁹ In 2011, the State of New Hampshire received \$590,000.

Additional refugee health care programs exist throughout the state and are organized by volunteer agencies.⁶⁰ Currently, three agencies receive discretionary federal funding through the Refugee Preventative Health Program grant. These agencies include the Lutheran Social Services, The International Institute, and the Manchester Health Department.⁶¹ Through this funding LSS and the IINH provide refugees with health case management. The Manchester Health Department utilizes this funding to provide refugee patients with interpreter services.⁶² While these programs do not specifically address mental health concerns, their assistance is likely to help refugees navigate the health care system so that they can receive proper treatment.



A fourth program funded by ORR's Refugee School Impact Grants, currently exists in New Hampshire.⁶³ Titled "Involving Refugee Parents in the Manchester Public School Systems", this program seeks to help refugee families integrate into the Manchester community. Studies have shown that integration reduces the likelihood of mental illness in both refugee parents and refugee youth. The following four programs are hosted throughout the year to achieve this goal:

- **The Welcoming Center:** At the welcoming center the Health Department offers a "one stop" opportunity to get required immunizations, register for school, and take English placement exams.⁶⁴
- **Family Understanding Nights (FUN):** Family Understanding Nights offer an opportunity for refugees to gather once a month for a fun dinner and to ask any questions they might have.⁶⁵
- **Culture Competency Workshops:** These workshops are offered to teachers throughout the district and seek to improve their knowledge of refugee cultures and to learn more about the families in the community. In 2005-6, representatives of the Minority Health Coalition conducted these workshops.⁶⁶
- **B.R.I.N.G.I.T:** Bringing Refugees, Immigrants, and Neighbors Gently Into Tomorrow offers afterschool soccer and dance programs for refugee youth and English classes for adults.

Data has been collected to help determine the efficacy of these programs, however precise outcomes have yet to be determined.⁶⁷

Two other programs exist in New Hampshire that seek to assist refugees with mental health issues. These programs differ from those previously mention in that they are not federally funded. The New Hampshire Community Dialogue and Needs Assessment for Addressing Traumatic Stress Among African Resettled Refugee Youth, was established in 2007. This program provides interviews and group dialogues to build community awareness and reduce treatment gaps of refugee trauma patients in New Hampshire.⁶⁸ The second program is The Somali Development Center located in Manchester, New Hampshire. This program provides healthcare planning and women's health advisory services to Somali refugees.⁶⁹

These additional healthcare services are not provided in every refugee's community. In New Hampshire this often presents a problem because not all medical professionals are aware of refugees' backgrounds or the various cultural differences that exist. These knowledge gaps can lead to less productive treatment, especially in the areas of mental health.⁷⁰ The New Hampshire Department of Human Health Services recognized this problem and drafted a report to help medical professionals, as well as the general public, be more aware of these differences. This online report provides background information



about typical mental health issues face refugees face, as well as suggestions for diagnosis and treatment.

2.3.2 Academic Literature on Refugee Mental Health

After forced migration, many refugees suffer mental health issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress, and other psychiatric disorders.⁷¹ Studies have shown that refugees have an elevated risk during the resettlement stage. Post-migration stressors such as unemployment, weak social supports, and social integration have been found to increase the likelihood of mental health issues.⁷² Other common sources include a lack of social support in the host country, separation from family and friends, insufficient language skills, or unfriendly reception and racism in their new community.⁷³

The academic literature also suggests that not all refugees experience the same degree of vulnerability. Individuals who have higher levels of education and who experience larger decreases in socioeconomic status after migration are more susceptible to mental difficulties. These individuals have been found to have a greater challenge dealing with their new identity and adapting to their new circumstances.⁷⁴ Women and seniors are also at a higher risk: because women and seniors are more likely to be unemployed and spend time home alone, they are at a greater risk of isolation and mental health problems.⁷⁵

Young refugees also have a higher risk for mental health issues. Refugee children must overcome a series of challenges such as marginalization and navigating new cultural identities. Comparably, younger children assimilate more quickly than their parents and other adults. This creates an acculturation gap and can often lead to less support and guidance from their parents as they adapt to new schools, peer groups, and communities.⁷⁶

Academic findings confirm the importance of mental health support for refugees upon arrival. Options suggested by experts include interventions for strengthening social networks, and finding adequate employment, which help to accelerate the integration process.⁷⁷ To assist with mental health diagnosis and assistance, research also suggests health care providers have an in-depth understanding of refugees' cultural needs, since cultural awareness can make a significant difference in therapeutic techniques.⁷⁸ Recent research has also provided information on how communities might address assisting refugees with mental health. These suggestions include engaging refugees and entire communities in programs that emphasize social growth and change in response to adversity.⁷⁹ In practice these community efforts have been shown to help build community cultural awareness.⁸⁰

2.3.3 Programs Available in Other States

Over the past decade, health associations across the United States have sought to bring greater attention to the significance of refugee mental health and the challenges faced by



medical care providers in delivering care. For example, in August 2012, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services hosted a conference, sponsored by The Office of Newcomer Services, to address mental health care in Virginia with a special focus on refugee assistance. The program sought to bring greater awareness and knowledge, but also provided free training for mental health providers, refugee staff, and other volunteers.⁸¹ Programs such as these represent states' action to improve awareness of mental health care of refugees. Aside from such statewide conferences, local health care providers primarily deliver services to refugees. Programs like the one offered by the Manchester school district exist across the country.

Third party private organizations provide the largest form of mental health assistance to refugees. The Healing Resources for Refugees, provided by the Minnesota Council of Churches, provides one of the most comprehensive refugee mental health programs. The program provides a full range of services to assist refugees and improve awareness through education across the state.⁸² Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services (BYRCS), is another such organization. "In 2001, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration Refugee Services merged with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to establish BYRCS".⁸³ This group seeks to "strengthen the capacity of refuge organizations to ensure successful development of refugee children and families".⁸⁴ One of their more notable programs is the "bridge the gap" program, which "seeks to bring together mainstream social service providers and refugee and immigrant-serving agencies".⁸⁵ Over the past decade BYRCS has established a wide range of services such as including programs, curriculum for schools and communities, consolation, training and webinars.⁸⁶ Their efforts to support refugees, increase awareness, and build infrastructure for aid play a significant role in addressing the mental health risks of refugee newcomers.⁸⁷

Many other state public health services, not specifically related to mental health, exist. The Community-Based Preventative Health Service in Massachusetts works to strengthen communication between organizations that aid refugees and community health centers and has outreach programs to educate refugees about health care issues.⁸⁸ In Minnesota, the Department of Refugee Health has a Refugee Health Lending Library containing educational materials especially for refugees about health problems they might encounter and about the American healthcare system. This library contains over 180 videos in 45 languages, which can deliver information to refugees even if they cannot yet understand English.⁸⁹ Minnesota also has a system that tracks refugee health, Electronic System for Health Assessment of Refugees (eSHARE). This online database compiles data from refugee health screenings. It allows officials to track health trends in refugees, develop best practices for interventions, assess the quality and equity of healthcare given to refugees, and connects volunteer organizations to healthcare providers who participate in the eSHARE program.⁹⁰

California's Refugee Health Program consists of three components funded by ORR: a Refugee Health Assessment Program (RHAP), a Refugee Preventive Health Program (RPHP), and a Refugee Medical Assistance Program (RMA). The RHAP provides



comprehensive health assessments for refugees, including screening for communicable and chronic diseases, assessing immunization status, mental health screening, and referrals. The RPHP program works with refugees identified as having chronic health issues during their initial screening to manage their conditions, and improve overall lifestyle and wellbeing. The RMA program provides medical benefits to refugees who are ineligible for Title XIX state-funded medical benefits for the first eight months from their arrival in the U.S. All of these programs emphasize culturally and linguistically appropriate strategies in providing assistance to refugees.⁹¹

The Social Services Division of Portland, Maine's Health and Human Services Department offers a short-term case management program that provides a full range of services to refugees for a period of six months to one year after arrival. Services provided by case managers include assistance in locating housing, necessities, employment, and government assistance, as well as cultural and independent living skills training and crisis management services. The department also provides cultural skills training to refugees and helps connect them with services such as English classes, health care, transportation, and childcare.⁹² The Georgia Department of Public Health provides a refugee health program that includes health assessment and immunization for refugees as well as case management to help clients deal with complex medical issues, ensure compliance with treatment plans, and assist them in visits to the hospital, doctor, or other medical professionals.⁹³

2.4 Civic Engagement

2.4.1 Overview of Refugee Civic Engagement in New Hampshire

One primary objective of the New Hampshire Refugee Program is to assist refugees with social adjustment upon arrival in the United States. Ms. Seebart discussed the limited opportunities available to refugees to interact with their new communities.⁹⁴ Civic engagement allows individuals to feel as though they are part of their new communities, whereas currently, refugees complain of feeling isolated and alone. According to Ms. Seebart, such isolation makes their transition to a productive life in New Hampshire and the United States increasingly difficult. In order to address this, New Hampshire offers a variety of direct and indirect approaches aimed at encouraging refugees to become active members of their communities. To promote civic engagement, recent refugees are provided with an orientation meeting in which representatives of various government and social service agencies make presentations concerning services available to them and how they can be accessed, state and local laws they should be aware of, as well as difficulties that other refugees experienced during their transition, which can include complex issues like which hospitals and doctors to see or simple matters such as where to find native foods.

Many of New Hampshire's most prominent programs for refugees are also geared towards increasing civic engagement. New Hampshire places a special emphasis on providing language courses for refugees, employment for those who are too old to attend



school, and access to primary and post-secondary education for refugees' dependents. English acquisition can break down language barriers that limit newcomers' interactions with members of their new community. This knowledge provides them with the ability to become active members of their communities and promotes civic engagement at any age. Promoting employment also has a large effect on improving refugees' sense of place in the community. Employment often allows for refugees to interact with diverse groups of people that they otherwise may not have known. Employment also provides refugees with an incentive to learn about local issues and laws.

Education of refugee children is also a primary objective of the current New Hampshire Refugee Resettlement program. Through classes, particularly in English and history, students are able to learn about the American system of governance and history. Additionally, some teachers throughout New Hampshire schools promote refugee integration and communal development in their classrooms by fostering a connection between refugee students and their native-born counterparts. Teachers have achieved this through cultural discussions and specific lessons geared towards cultural understanding.⁹⁵ In addition to these formal programs, students are given the opportunity to become active in community problem solving, specifically regarding problems focused on refugee resettlement. Young people are able to actively identify community issues and aid in the creation and execution of strategies that will improve conditions, all the while promoting civic engagement amongst a generation of new Americans.⁹⁶

2.4.2 Academic Literature on Refugee Civic Engagement

According to a 2004 report, "Pursuing Democracy's Promise: Newcomer Civic Participation in America," the benefits of promoting civic engagement amongst newcomers include allowing refugees to educate themselves, develop human capital through the acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. These benefits could also include building networks of relationships with those of similar and different backgrounds, which sociologist Robert Putnam argues is essential for healthy communities.⁹⁷ Civic engagement and participation also allows refugees to integrate into American society.⁹⁸

Academic research outlines that many refugees do not have time to form the interpersonal relationships that would allow them to become active within their communities. In order to support themselves, they are often required to hold more than one job while dealing with the inherent difficulties of their transition to the United States, including learning English, caring for their families, and working to navigate through the federal government's aid programs.⁹⁹

English skills also have a major impact on refugees' civic engagement. English acquisition enables refugees to communicate with native English speakers in new communities, which can help build relationships and promote inclusion. English helps newcomers to develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that will ultimately promote the development of refugee community leaders.¹⁰⁰



The literature about education of refugee children as it pertains to civic engagement emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity of host communities, maintaining one's native culture, and providing services for parents. Research on the language attainment of refugee children by Lynn McBrien of the University of Southern Florida reveals the importance of liaisons between schools and refugee parents, proper training for teachers, and continued reinforcement of a child's native culture and language. The study shows that children usually learn English significantly faster than their parents, which can lead to role reversals. For instance, children may have to translate documents from their schools, write checks for the family, and translate for their parents at school events. The study also revealed that inadequate teacher training about cultural sensitivity can lead to misunderstandings and inadvertent discrimination and prejudice. McBrien recommends that teachers who will receive refugee students should go through special, high quality training in order to slowly transition students and their parents into American culture and increase participation in the community.¹⁰¹

2.4.3 Programs Available in Other States

Programs that promote civic engagement are often provided at the municipal rather than state level. The city of Seattle has provided a number of examples of methods to increase refugee participation. They include:

- Establishing the Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board that is tasked with the responsibility of advising all city departments and offices in matters affecting immigrants and refugees and working to encourage understanding between and among the various immigrant and refugee communities and the larger Seattle community.¹⁰²
- Informing immigrants and refugee communities about boards and commission vacancies. Immigrants and refugees have applied and been appointed to these opportunities as a result.¹⁰³
- Mayor McGinn's Engage Seattle Initiative targeted efforts will be designed to improve refugee communities' access to government, facilitate volunteerism in education, and develop emerging leaders. The Mayor's Office will plan and conduct community meetings, Mayoral tours, and interactions with legislative and executive bodies of the City with the immigrant and refugee community.¹⁰⁴
- The Mayor's Office and key departments will engage refugee community members in the Seattle Youth and Families Initiative to identify challenges youth and families face.¹⁰⁵
- Seattle also offers a wide range of information online detailing local community events and activities in a number of different languages.¹⁰⁶



Though the government plays a major role in promoting civic engagement amongst refugees, independent groups have formed with the same objective throughout the United States. These groups aim to foster refugee participation through formal and informal channels. Some of these projects include:

- **Hmong Youth Get Out the Vote:** A small group of Hmong youth in St. Paul, MN worked to reduce voter apathy amongst high school friends through a campaign in which they organized a debate at school, invited elected officials and candidates and distributed campaign materials. Voter turnout increased to over 80 percent amongst the targeted group.¹⁰⁷
- **Vietnamese Parent-Teacher Association:** A group of Vietnamese refugees created a Vietnamese American Parent-Teacher Association in order to help refugees and their parents understand their options for funding a post secondary education.¹⁰⁸
- **Neighborhood Colleges:** In the suburbs of a major urban area, a diverse group of refugees and immigrants came together to create a group that introduced new Americans to the county government, including how various boards and commissions that serve as vehicles for community input and participation work.¹⁰⁹

There are a number of programs that exist elsewhere throughout the United States that improve refugee civic participation. These programs exist at the state and local level and are offered through formal channels, like state and county governments, or informal channels like community organizations. These organizations work to promote civic engagement through their specific objectives, like increasing awareness of the political system, but also promote interpersonal relationships that allow refugees to feel more connected in their new communities.

3. CONCLUSION

Refugee resettlement is a complex process. Successful integration is equally dependent on the strength of the programs, as it is the initial framework for supporting refugees' resettlement. In this paper, we examined the strength of current employment, transportation, mental health, and civic engagement resettlement programs. After assessing the programs currently available in New Hampshire, programs offered in other states, and best practices defined by academic research, we have identified a series of possible options to improve the effectiveness of these respective programs in New Hampshire.

Through our assessment of transportation, we found that the main challenge New Hampshire refugees face is public transportation that does not serve their needs adequately. This is a particular issue for refugees who cannot afford to purchase a car.



One policy option is to revise employment resettlement policies to allow greater flexibility when selecting a job. Instead of requiring refugees to accept the first job offer, regardless of location, policies could allow refugees to select a job that matches their means of transportation. A second option is to increase community-based supports. Local agencies that currently do not provide services or receive funding could apply for federal and third party grants to provide private transportation services to low-income refugees.

When examining current mental health care services provided in New Hampshire, we found that the discrepancy of care between communities presented the greatest challenge for refugees. While all refugees receive some healthcare upon arrival, specific mental health treatment depends on the specific community. While some cities provide many services and take initiative to increase community awareness, this is not true across the state. One policy option for communities that currently do provide services is to apply for discretionary grant funding. Community organizations can apply for funding under the Federal Preventative Health Program or Targeted Assistance provided by ORR. Private third party grants are also available for such initiatives. With additional funding, these communities could host conferences to educate health care providers and members of their communities on effective treatment options for refugees who suffer from mental health illnesses.

The biggest challenge that refugees face regarding civic engagement is the lack of opportunity to participate in community events that promote interpersonal connections. One viable option is to strengthen civic engagement through community events that bring different groups together and promote cultural understanding and community building. Currently, some communities in New Hampshire do provide these opportunities, thus this option particularly pertains to those communities that do not offer any type of community engagement program that focuses on bridging the gap between refugees and other members of the community. Again, federal or third party competitive grants are available for funding these initiatives. Academic research has shown that providing these types of opportunities strengthens civic engagement of not only refugees across the state, but all New Hampshire citizens.

The success of refugee resettlement relies on the strength of these counterpart programs. Adequate transportation, mental health services, and ample opportunities for job progression are pertinent for refugees to sustain steady employment and to make bonds within their host community. While current New Hampshire resettlement programs adequately serve the needs of many refugees, implementing these policy and program changes could ensure that all refugees across the State experience successful resettlement. To achieve this requires the cooperation of local governments, voluntary agencies, and social service organizations that work together to ensure that every refugee is given opportunities to adjust and adapt successfully to life in the United States.



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¹⁰⁴ Ibid

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