



ONONDAGA CITIZENS LEAGUE

| 2012-2013 Study, Report No.32

# THE WORLD AT OUR DOORSTEP

# Onondaga Citizens League

## Mission Statement

The Onondaga Citizens League fosters informed public discourse by identifying and studying critical community issues affecting Central New York, developing recommendations for action, and communicating study findings to interested and affected groups.

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# The World at Our Doorstep

## *Acknowledgments*

The Onondaga Citizens League published its first study report in 1979, the same year that the first refugees from Vietnam were resettled in Syracuse. It is somehow fitting then, that as OCL celebrates the 35th anniversary of its founding, we release our latest report, *The World at Our Doorstep*, which explores – and celebrates – our community’s continuing commitment to welcoming and resettling refugees from all over the world.

This year’s study on refugee resettlement grew out of an awareness that while Syracuse has a long history of welcoming new populations, the increasing numbers of refugees resettled here in recent years have brought concerns about the community’s ability to absorb these new residents and help them adjust. Many recent refugees come from areas of the world where they suffered years of civil strife, warfare and deprivation. They arrive with fewer resources and higher needs than past refugees. The Citizens League study sought to determine what might be done to strengthen the existing human services system that helps refugees thrive and become part of our community.

Acknowledgement is due to the Study Committee and its co-chairs, Heidi Holtz and Kristen Mucitelli-Heath who never wavered in their commitment and passion to the study process and the topic. Study writer Becky Sernett excelled in keeping us grounded and weaving our many conversation threads into a cohesive report; designer Nancy Boyce created the attractive layout and graphic artist Brenna Merritt provided the cover design. OCL office coordinator Colleen Karl-Howe managed the process from start to finish. We are also grateful to Karen Villi at PEC, Inc., our host for many morning meetings, and also to the United Way and Brian Moore for use of the Gifford Community Room. Many thanks to Northside UP, Hopeprint and the Butternut Community Police Center for use of their photographs, and to Damian Rakowsky for the colorful infographic.

Special thanks are extended to the individual and corporate members who support the work of the League through their membership dues and financial donations, and to University College of Syracuse University for its administrative and organizational support of the work of OCL.

For 35 years, the Onondaga Citizens League has represented a remarkable example of citizen participation in public affairs in Central New York. Founded in 1978, OCL is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that encourages citizen engagement in public issues. OCL’s annual study on a topic of community-wide importance culminates in a report designed to help citizens comprehend the issue and its implications, and give policy-makers and community groups recommendations for action.

**Sandra Barrett**  
*Executive Vice President*  
*April 2013*

## Message from Study Co-Chairs

This study has been an incredible journey. One of the more interesting aspects of *“The World at our Doorstep”* has been a clear revelation of how equally important a story is, in addition to a consideration of factual data.

We came to the topic seeking information and leave the formal study process enriched, not just by facts and figures but also motivated and empowered by the stories we’ve heard along the way. Perhaps more than past studies, this was not just about numbers and resources, but about people. We heard stories about trauma and sadness, but we heard many more of success and triumph.

Relatively early in the study, we realized that even if the study stopped at that moment - the collaborative work and discussions had made a difference. Connections were made, there was forward motion. We cannot speak highly enough about the dozens of people who participated on the study committee — for whether attending just one presentation, many or all, they showed a commitment to not just learning, but sharing.

**Heidi Holtz and Kristen Mucitelli-Heath**  
*co-chairs*

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## Our Vision of Central New York as a Welcoming Community

### *We envision...*

- Central New York as a community that welcomes refugees and celebrates their diverse cultures.
- Central New York as a community where men, women and children from different backgrounds, cultures and religions can learn about and understand one another in peace.
- Central New York as a community that provides refugee families with the necessary services, resources and support in a way that maximizes coordination among agencies, provides a clear path for refugees, minimizes duplication and balances existing community needs.
- Central New York as a community where refugees are given the tools to help themselves become economically independent residents who revitalize our neighborhoods, strengthen the social fabric of our community, and become fully integrated into the civic life of the community.



## Introduction: The World at Our Doorstep

*“The practice of granting asylum to people fleeing persecution in foreign lands is one of the earliest hallmarks of civilization. References to it have been found in texts written 3,500 years ago, during the blossoming of the great early empires in the Middle East such as the Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and ancient Egyptians.”*

—United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees<sup>1</sup>

When Hari Adhikari, a Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese, was expelled from his home in Bhutan by the government, he became a leader in the refugee camp in western Nepal, where he lived for 17 years before being resettled in Syracuse with his family in 2008—the first Bhutanese refugees in Syracuse. Now as a case worker for Catholic Charities, one of the two agencies that resettle refugees sent here, he works with new Bhutanese refugees, and newcomers from other countries, to help them make a new life in a place they may have first heard of only a week before. Both as a case worker and as a community member he helps refugees navigate through the paperwork and officialdom, as well as the elements of everyday life that are so unfamiliar. Not least, as one of the leaders of the Bhutanese Community Association, he works to mobilize the refugees to help themselves and to help each other, just as he did in the refugee camp.

Syracuse has a long history of welcoming new populations. For thirty-five years we have been a refugee resettlement site but there has been a recent boost in arrivals with the average number of new refugees increasing from 450 individuals to more than 800 individuals annually in the last several years. In addition, Syracuse seems to be settling refugee populations that have fewer resources and higher needs.

As the refugee population grows and becomes increasingly visible, questions about their adjustment within our community have emerged. The economic downturn has exacerbated a perception that the refugees are a drain on services, are taking jobs, are unable to function due to literacy issues, and other “story lines.” Yet their presence

has helped stabilize the City’s population and success stories from the earlier waves of refugees abound.

When the OCL Board of Directors selected refugee resettlement as its 2012 study topic, its primary purpose was to develop a clearer picture and understanding of the refugee dynamic in Onondaga County—the needs, the service continuum and the opportunities new refugee populations offer—and to examine best practices here and around the country in order to recommend programming and policies to make us a more welcoming community. One of the reasons the refugee topic was chosen is that a local private foundation, the Gifford Foundation, had already convened a “Working Group” of individuals who were interested in or actively engaged with refugees to examine refugee resettlement in Onondaga County, specifically Syracuse, where the majority of the refugees are resettled.

Approximately 12,000 refugees and former refugees currently reside in Syracuse, according to InterFaith Works Center for New Americans.<sup>2</sup> Low cost of living, job opportunities and resettlement agencies’ strong working relationships with the Syracuse City School District are some of the reasons why refugees have been and continue to be resettled here. Of course, our region, like the rest of the nation and world, is just beginning to recover from economic recession. And so we have to acknowledge that this has affected resettlement progress, particularly in the availability of employment and demand on support services.

Usually, this report will refer to refugees simply as refugees; they will be grouped into one category en masse. However, we must emphasize that refugees are people,—men, women and children—who, like us, are as unique as our fingerprints. Refugees do not comprise one homogeneous group, even if they come from the same home country, where they may have belonged to different ethnic or religious groups. And so by referring to refugees—either individually or as a group—in this way, we do not mean to imply that they are all the same.

What they all do have in common, however, is that they are here in our country as refugees, a status intended to offer them a place to make a permanent home. By leaving their home countries, they have fled the worst experiences imaginable; by resettling in Central New York, they hope for the best. And it is in this partnership of hope that the OCL study committee framed this question: How can Central New York become a more successful refugee community?

“Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” lies at the hearts of many refugees who resettle here, particularly with the opportunity to become U.S. citizens and build new, permanent homes. The American declaration of rights is a dream for the hundreds of refugees who come to Syracuse each year facing many difficult transitions. The ease of their transition is dependent on many factors. A refugee’s familiarity with Western culture, knowledge of English, literacy in a native language, experience and coping with trauma, and physical health all affect the pace of acclimation. In the community, access to available resettlement and support services, the availability of jobs, and the quality and quantity of social support from family, countrymen, neighbors and volunteers can all help or hinder integration.

In some ways, the OCL study has already made Syracuse a model for refugee resettlement by convening refugees, stakeholders and community members in a series of meetings to discuss the topic. Service providers and concerned individuals, some of whom did not know each other, have been able to network, share information and explore ideas that wouldn’t have been accessible to them without these dialogues. In addition, the study laid the groundwork for Syracuse to become one of only 20 cities nationwide invited to apply for a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to link refugee resettlement services and create pathways to economic opportunity for refugees and new Americans. We see this study as a beginning, as the opening of doors to greater possibilities; this is similar to how many refugees view us—Central New York as a region of hope.

The series of findings and recommendations at the end of each section of this report point to specific actions and areas for further study.

First and foremost, we recommend that the 2012 Study Committee on refugees should be considered the beginning of a more formal, on-going Refugee Task Force that will continue and expand the base of communication begun by the Gifford Work Group. The following stakeholder groups should be represented and meet on a regular basis:

- Refugee community organizations
- Resettlement agencies
- Refugee Assistance Program
- Representatives of the medical community
- Literacy organizations
- Police and fire officers
- Landlords
- Refugees
- Syracuse City School District
- Grassroots organizations
- Social Service agencies
- Volunteers and tutors

The task force should meet regularly to share ideas, resources and tackle critical needs. A first priority should be addressing the qualitative assessment of literacy services and refugees’ unique literacy needs. The Task Force should evolve out of the Refugee Working Group that was previously convened by The Gifford Foundation. The Foundation has agreed to continue its role as convener in helping the Task Force become established over the next six months.



### *Scope of Study and Methodology*

The committee convened study sessions in which agencies and individuals involved in refugee resettlement, as well as concerned residents, including refugees, met to discuss the issues. For a while, Gifford’s Working Group operated independently from the study; but when the study gained momentum, the Working Group suspended its meetings so that its members could participate more fully. (The OCL invited members from the refugee community to come and share their ideas and experiences, and while we were pleased that every session had some refugee participation, the committee was unable to hear from as many refugees as it would have liked; one of the study’s recommendations is to find ways to empower refugees to play more active roles in the improvement of their resettlement in Syracuse.)

In the beginning of the study, committee sessions took a broad, question-gathering approach, as study members sought to understand the global-to-local resettlement process as well as the breadth and depth of local services. Next, meetings focused on specific service areas, with a subcommittee and panel of volunteer “experts” for each. Experts included representatives of local organizations as well as individuals who offer services in the focus area. Some refugees and concerned residents also participated on panels. Subcommittees then gave presentations to the larger committee. Focus areas included:

- Resettlement Agency Services
- History of Settlement in Syracuse
- Literacy and Education
- Housing
- Health
- Crime and Safety
- Economic Opportunities and Jobs
- Grassroots and Community Organizations

Outside research and interviews with other experts, agencies and organizations involved in local and national refugee resettlement were also conducted. A list of resources with more information about agencies, groups and services of importance to refugee resettlement is included in an appendix.



## The Refugee Crisis: A Global Perspective

*The United States has a history of upholding human rights and humanitarian principles. For decades we have led the world in overseas support for humanitarian protection and assistance, and we have provided asylum and refugee resettlement for millions. In doing so, we show through example our dedication to basic human decency, to our responsibilities under international law, and—along with the rest of the international community—to ensuring refuge when innocent lives hang in the balance. We do this because our country’s values must be a critical component of our foreign policy.”<sup>3</sup>*

—U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,  
World Refugee Day, June 20, 2011.

For nearly 35 years, Syracuse has been part of an international humanitarian effort. Our first resettled refugees were the Vietnamese in 1979<sup>5</sup>, and for the past decade, we have been welcoming refugees from nearly 40 countries. To get a better understanding of these newcomers and how our community can improve its process for welcoming and assisting them, we need to include a brief introduction on the global refugee situation and how the United States plays a critical part in the humanitarian effort.

### **Who is a Refugee?**

The terms “refugee” and “immigrant” are often misused interchangeably.

A **refugee** is a person who, having a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country....”<sup>6</sup>

This legal definition was established after World War II at the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, when hundreds of thousands of men, women and children wandered Europe, unable to find permanent resettlement. The convention also created the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the official body designating refugee status and directing where among participating countries refugees should be resettled.

Unlike refugees, immigrants often resettle in a different country for economic and/or personal reasons (to join family or improve their prospects, for example). Also, immigrants can return to their home country and still receive that country’s protection.

Refugees, on the other hand, must move to save their lives or maintain their freedom; they have no protection in their own country, and it is often their own government they are fleeing.

They are, in essence, homeless and country-less. The United States, in granting refugee status, offers the man, woman or child protection that he or she doesn’t have elsewhere. Refugees do not get to choose where they are resettled; this is the responsibility of the UNHCR or other referring organization. Efforts are made, however, to reunite refugees with families already resettled in the United States. Refugees are similar to asylees, except that asylees are already in the United States when they apply for asylum. To be given refugee status, an individual must be located outside of the United States.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are approximately 15.4 million refugees worldwide.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the 15.4 million refugees remain in their own regions in countries of “first asylum.” For example, in 2010, Pakistan hosted more than 1.7 million refugees, nearly all of whom were from Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Those refugees who can return home do.

Not only does the United States take the largest number of refugees among countries of third resettlement, it is also the largest single donor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2012, the United States donated \$724 million to the UNHCR; Japan was the next largest donor, contributing \$185 million.<sup>4</sup>



Approximately 530,000 refugees were able to voluntarily return home in 2011.<sup>9</sup>

Less than 1 percent of the world's refugees are resettled in a third country, known as countries of third resettlement.<sup>10</sup> The United States is the 10th largest hosting country for refugees, with an estimated 264,800 refugees and former refugees residing in the U.S. in 2011.<sup>11</sup> ("Hosting" countries include those that act as "first asylums," such as Pakistan and Kenya.) In terms of third-country resettlement,

however, the U.S. leads the global effort, taking around 70 percent of refugees approved for resettlement. Canada and Australia are the next largest, together taking about 20 percent of refugees resettled by the UN refugee agency.

After fleeing their home countries, refugees must prove to the UNHCR and to the U.S. Department of State through an application and interview process that they are refugees. They may then apply for resettlement. Applicants are screened by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and about one in four applicants is accepted. For fiscal year 2012 (October 2011 to September 2012), the U.S. resettled about 58,000 refugees. The Department of State had intended to resettle 76,000 refugees, but an augmented security screening process caused delays. It expects 2013 refugee arrivals to be closer to the proposed ceiling of 70,000.<sup>12</sup>

To cover the cost of the airfare to the United States, refugees are offered interest-free travel loans by the International Organization for Migration on behalf of the U.S. Department of State. Depending on the number of people traveling, loans can range from around \$1,000 to as much as \$10,000. Refugees are expected to repay the loans within 46 months of their arrival. If a refugee is finding this difficult, he or she can apply for a waiver or deferment. Loans that go into default result in negative credit ratings and can impede U.S. citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

## Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT ARE REFUGEES' RIGHTS?

Refugees have the same basic rights as everyone else in the United States, including freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly. They are protected against discrimination on the basis of their race, religion or ethnic background.

### WHAT LAWS DO REFUGEES FOLLOW?

Refugees must abide by U.S. law. If they are accused of a crime, refugees are innocent until proven guilty. If a refugee is found guilty of a crime, he or she may be deported back to his or her home country.

### DO REFUGEES PAY TAXES?

Yes. Refugees are subject to the same income, property, employment, sales and other tax laws as U.S. citizens.

### CAN REFUGEES VOTE?

No. Refugees cannot vote until they become U.S. citizens and have registered to vote. Refugees are eligible to apply for citizenship after having status as a legal permanent resident for five years.

### ARE REFUGEES FAST-TRACKED FOR GREEN CARDS?

No. Refugees, like other non-permanent residents, can only apply for Green Cards (permanent resident status) after one year of residency in the United States.

### ARE REFUGEES GIVEN PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN HIRING?

Refugees aren't given special treatment in employment considerations. Refugees often take jobs in sectors in which there aren't enough native workers to fill the employment needs. Some refugees start their own businesses, and this can be a boost to a community's economic renewal.

### DO REFUGEES COME HERE FOR ECONOMIC REASONS?

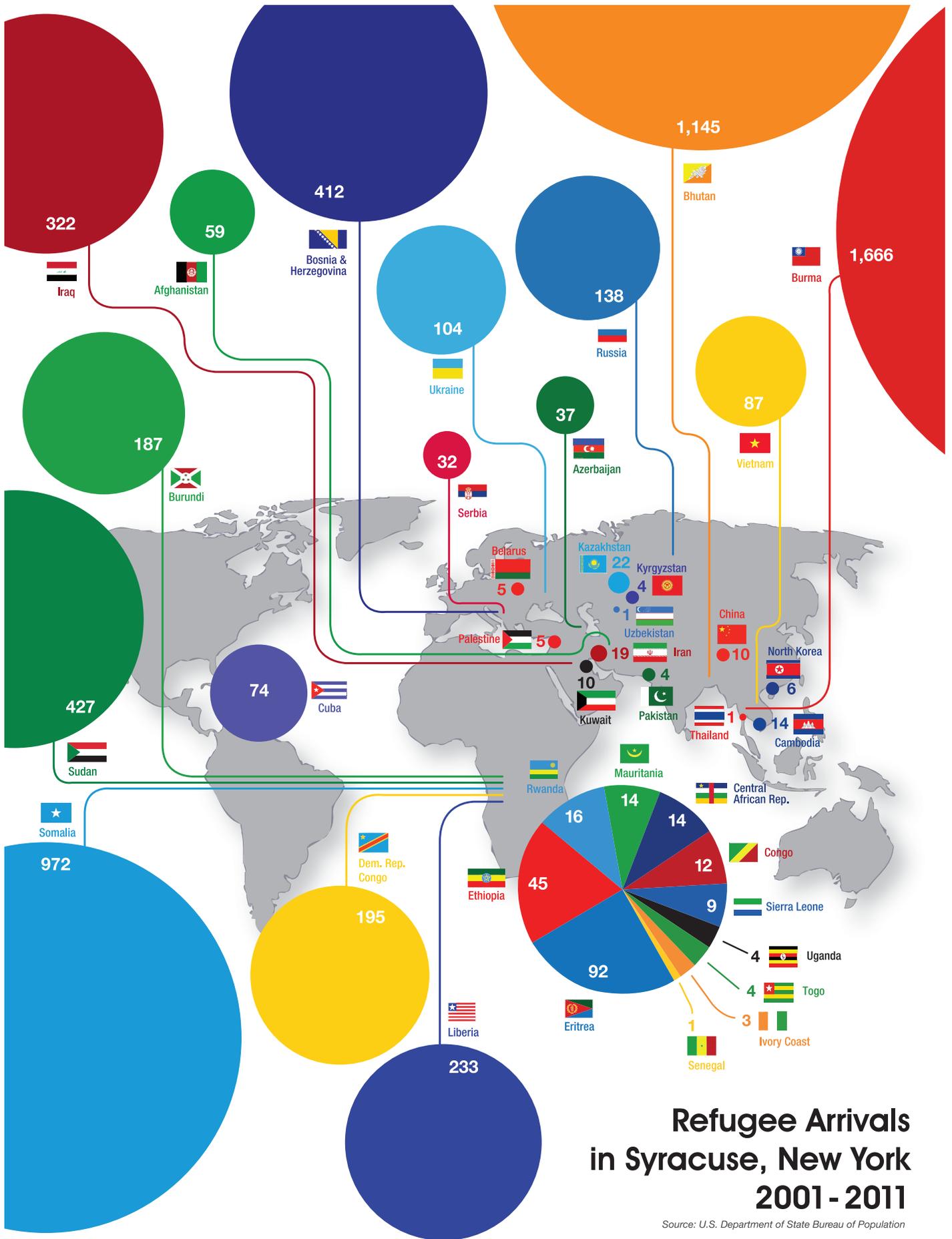
Refugees who resettle in the United States fled their countries because they were forced to and are unable to return. Most refugees have lost everything they owned, and many have left friends and family behind. Once in the U.S., refugees must rebuild their livelihoods.

### DO REFUGEES POSE HEALTH HAZARDS?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention keeps track of all refugee admissions and won't allow an individual into the country if he or she has a health condition considered hazardous to the public.

### ARE REFUGEES NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS?

New and extensive security screening procedures have been undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which determines when and if refugees are eligible for resettlement. According to the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, the United States will not grant refugee status to anyone who: "ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."





## Syracuse: The World At Our Doorstep

*“This year, my family and I will participate in our fourth United Nations World Refugee Day [on June 20, 2012] celebration.* We are excited to celebrate and share our happiness with refugees around the world. I never imagined I would again be able to celebrate my culture and traditions. Now, we’re getting back some of what we lost. After fleeing sectarian conflicts, oppression and threats of imprisonment, hoping for safety and shelter, we found peace, friendship, happiness and encouragement for our new life with a future in America.

After Saddam Hussein’s regime collapsed in 2003, everyone in Iraq was happy and we thought life would be better in the future. Shortly, however, terrorists took over our country and my city. Corruption, sectarianism and civil war became our everyday lives. My family and I were threatened; our peace was lost. I felt that we could not regain peace unless we left Iraq.

In 2009, we left Iraq through the International Organization for Migration Program. In America, we faced many challenges with language barriers and cultural differences. Yet we were not intimidated; we wanted to be successful in our new life in America. Within a short time, my children and wife began learning English. They excelled in school and made great progress. I found employment, first as an Arabic translator for medical appointments and tutor for elementary students. Since June 2010, I have been working at InterFaith Works of CNY as an employment specialist. My position motivates me to help other refugees.

To us, World Refugee Day is a way of expressing our appreciation, a way to thank Americans for their assistance and support. In Iraq, we have an expression: ‘They open their home’ for us. The United States has opened its home, and we have been able to live life peacefully. For this, we are sincerely grateful.”

—Harith Alnoamy, Iraqi refugee

From The Post-Standard; Daily Inspiration, June 12, 2012

### ***Recent Refugee Resettlement***

From 2001 through 2012, 7,210 refugees were resettled in Syracuse, according to the U.S. Department of State. Syracuse has welcomed refugees from nations as far away as North Korea and as close as Cuba, from countries as well known as Iraq to the lesser known, like Togo. Newly

arriving refugee populations shift from year to year as global crises flare up and calm down and refugee camp populations swell then ebb.

At the beginning of the new millennium, refugees from Bosnian-Herzegovina were the primary new arrivals, as they were unable to return home after the Bosnian War. The next waves of refugees came from Sudan, as the “Lost Boys” were resettled. Somali refugees followed, as many as 241 in 2004. Syracuse has welcomed a steady wave of Somalis, making them the third largest refugee group resettled since 2001 (1,098 total). Refugees from Burma (Myanmar) began arriving in large numbers in 2007; since 2001, a total of 1,857 Burmese refugees have resettled in Syracuse, making them the largest group of recent refugees in Syracuse.

In 2008, Bhutanese refugees began arriving, and they continue to be resettled here. In 2012, 282 Bhutanese refugees came to Syracuse. The total number of Bhutanese resettled since 2008 is 1,427; this makes Bhutan the No. 2 country of origin for refugee resettlement during the past decade. Syracuse’s refugee populations reflect the national trend. The top three countries of origin for refugees resettling in the United States in 2012 were: Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar), and Iraq; and the U.S. Department of State expects these to be the top three countries for 2013.

Not included in the U.S. Department of State’s refugee statistics for Syracuse are the numbers of refugees who are considered “secondary migrants”—refugees who were initially resettled outside of Syracuse but relocate here, usually to be closer to friends and family. The UNHCR has difficulty tracking secondary migration, so hard data is unavailable. However, local resettlement agencies—Catholic Charities Resettlement Services and InterFaith Works Center for New Americans—estimate that about 250 secondary migrants come to Syracuse annually. Because they have moved away from their initial resettlement home, these individuals won’t have direct case management oversight. The agencies have said that refugees who do not appear to receive help from local resettlement services may in fact be secondary migrants.

Refugees arriving in the past decade are increasingly more diverse, have a wide range of formal schooling and professional experience, and the Department of State has recognized that this has made resettlement more challenging.

Here are brief profiles of the countries of origin of Syracuse's most recent refugees.

#### BURMA/MYANMAR<sup>14</sup>

- Burmese resettled in Syracuse from 2001-2012: 1,857
- Tribes in Syracuse: Karen, Kachin, Burmese, Chin, Mon and Karenni (Kayah)
- Official language of Burma: Burmese (Myanmar)
- Major Religions of Burmese Refugees in Syracuse: Buddhism and Christianity

According to the UNHCR, the Union of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) is one of the largest refugee-producing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Geographically, it is the second-largest nation in mainland South-East Asia. It is also one of the most ethnically diverse. Besides the Burmese, the major ethnic groups are the Arakanese, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karenni, Karen, and Mon. Each of these ethnic groups has its own state in which it is the dominant ethnic group.<sup>15</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, the country suffers from decades of civil war, ethnic civil war, inter-ethnic conflict, military oppression and genocide.<sup>16</sup> When Cyclone Nargis hit in 2008, it destroyed more lives, particularly after the government blocked humanitarian aid.

#### BHUTAN

- Bhutanese resettled in Syracuse from 2001-2012: 1,427
- Major Languages: Nepali (Tamang, Mongor, Rai, Limbu)
- Major Religions of Bhutanese Refugees in Syracuse: Hinduism (to a lesser extent, Buddhism, Christianity and others)

Bhutan is a mountainous, landlocked nation nestled between China and India. According to Human Rights Watch, "The Bhutanese refugee crisis began in 1991 when Bhutan began to expel ethnic Nepalis, a policy that resulted in the expulsion of one-sixth of the country's population."<sup>17</sup> Thousands of ethnic Nepalis, referred to as Lhotshampas or "southerners," fled to Nepal after suffering violence and persecution. More than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan lived in UNHCR refugee camps in Nepal; resettlement began in 2008. The United States has welcomed more than 65,000 Bhutanese refugees.<sup>18</sup>

#### SOMALIA

- Somalis resettled in Syracuse from 2001-2012: 1,098
- Major Languages: Kizigua, Somali, Swahili and Arabic
- Major Religions of Somali Refugees in Syracuse: Islam

In June 2011, the head of the UNHCR referred to the crisis in Somalia as the "worst humanitarian disaster in the world."<sup>19</sup> Somalis suffered severe drought, famine, and more than 20 years of clan warfare that toppled the government

in 1991. According to the United Nations, the fighting and famine forced more than one million Somalis to flee to neighboring countries Kenya and Ethiopia, which house the largest refugee camps in the world.<sup>20</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State, more than 95,000 Somalis have been resettled in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

#### SOUTH SUDAN

- Sudanese resettled in Syracuse from 2001-2012: 450
- Major Languages: Dinka, Arabic and English
- Major Religions of Sudanese Refugees in Syracuse: Christianity and Islam

In 2011, South Sudan won independence from Sudan, a nation whose second civil war (1983-2005, between the North and South) drove more than 20,000 "Lost Boys" to refugee camps thousands of miles away. Despite peace agreements, violence and civil unrest continues. The New York Times reported in June 2012 that another wave of thousands of unaccompanied children (boys and some girls) have fled their homes because of the conflicts.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. Department of State estimates there are around 80,000 South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries.<sup>23</sup> According to the UNHCR, the United States has welcomed more than 170,000 Sudanese refugees since 1988.<sup>24</sup>

#### IRAQ

- Iraqis resettled in Syracuse from 2001-2012: 397
- Major Languages: Arabic and Kurdish
- Major Religions of Iraqi Refugees in Syracuse: Islam

Although the United States has declared the Iraq War over, instability and violence remain as ethnic and civil conflicts continue, along with a terrorist al-Qaeda threat.<sup>25</sup> As a result, millions of Iraqis have been forced from their homes.<sup>26</sup> These displaced Iraqis often live with no access to services or rights to the properties they occupy. Many live without adequate shelter and have limited access to water, electricity, schools and health centers.<sup>27</sup> Iraqis who had found asylum in Syria fled back to Iraq in 2012 when violence in Syria erupted, and they remain vulnerable and displaced.<sup>28</sup>

*"A fellow caseworker, a Burmese man who arrived in Syracuse six years ago, and I picked up a family of seven at the airport after they had been traveling for more than 24 hours from a refugee camp in Thailand.* Although the family was technically Burmese, they had been living for years in Thailand in a camp and three of their children were without citizenship since they were born in Thailand, but neither Burma nor Thailand would recognize them as citizens. I loaded their luggage (two large, plastic bags) in the back of

In 2012, Syracuse welcomed 805 refugees. Since 2001, a total of 7,210 refugees have been resettled here. Syracuse is just one community in New York welcoming refugees. In the past 12 years, nearly 41,000 refugees have been resettled in New York State.<sup>29</sup> Other major resettlement communities in upstate New York include: Albany (1,832), Binghamton (297), (Buffalo (9186), Ithaca (125), Rochester (5240), and Utica (4,770).

my pickup truck and piled four of the children into the cab with me, while the other caseworker, drove the other three. Not speaking a word of English, it took some sign language and demonstrating to explain how to buckle a seatbelt and how to work the automatic door locks. Finally, they settled in and we drove to their new home in Syracuse, a three-bedroom house on the Northside.

Of course, I don't speak Burmese at all, and so I didn't try to make conversation but simply turned on the radio (to the delight of the little boys in the back). Honestly, and this rarely happens to me, I felt slightly out of my element. To the people sitting in my car, I was an anomaly, a complete and total enigma, just as they were to me, and we had no way of communicating. I was just one more strange thing for them to add to their long list of strange things they had seen since stepping foot in the United States.

Fortunately for them, another Burmese family was waiting at their house, even though it was midnight, and took them home for the night to sleep and give them a hot meal. With my job done, I smiled and turned to leave, but was stopped, to my surprise, by the host, a Burmese man who has lived in Syracuse since 2007. "Won't you stay and eat with us?" he asked in Burmese. (The other caseworker translated for me.) And I hesitated before realizing that they were actually eager to have me stay and sample their Burmese cooking. They wanted the opportunity to teach the American something, to draw me into their world a little, in contrast to having been thrust so abruptly and completely into ours.

Relaxing a little, I took off my shoes and sat down on the room-size plastic mat called a *piat* (I think), and they passed around bowls of rice to which each person added their choice of fish, meat, or shrimp and rich oily sauces, both spicy and sweet. One of the little boys, about three years old with the most endearing smile I've ever seen, dug in with his hands.

Speaking through the other caseworker, my host then invited me to break the fast and celebrate Ramadan, the Muslim holiday, on Friday with his family."

—Christine Mehta, a Syracuse University graduate who volunteered with InterFaith Works during her studies.

She now works as a multimedia journalist and lives in India.

## ***How Local Resettlement Works***

Two local nonprofit organizations—Catholic Charities Resettlement Services and InterFaith Works Center for New Americans resettle refugees in Syracuse. These agencies work under three of the nine national Voluntary Agencies, or VOLAGs, that contract with the U.S. Department of State to resettle refugees: the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Church World Service, and Episcopal Migration Ministries.<sup>30</sup> Federal money for resettlement is funneled through these national organizations to the local agencies. Representatives of the local agencies, along with those from the Syracuse City School District's Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) meet weekly and work closely together to network their services as much as possible.

Resettlement agencies receive \$1,125 for each refugee arriving here. Of that money, \$925 must be given to each refugee so he or she can pay for rent, food, etc. The more members in a family, the more money it receives (\$925 per refugee). The remaining \$200 is pooled into a fund that the agency can dip into should families need more funds. It can be difficult for smaller families and individuals to survive on the \$925 per-person allotment. Resettlement agencies also receive an additional \$725 per refugee to pay its administrative costs. This usually isn't enough to pay all of their costs, so the resettlement agencies regularly apply for and receive a variety of grants from such organizations as the United Way, etc. Agency grants can also fund special projects. Two types of refugees are resettled in Syracuse: those considered "free" cases (individuals with no U.S. ties) and those with U.S. ties. Local resettlement agencies have no control over who is resettled in Syracuse, but they will verify a refugee's U.S. ties and whether or not the family or friends can offer the refugee a support network. Support is essential to a refugee's resettlement.

## **RESETTLEMENT TIMELINE**

The Department of State mandates most of the resettlement process in terms of what services agencies need to provide (or facilitate) and when. Agencies must provide 90-days of case management for newly arrived refugees; but in many cases, refugees need a longer period of assistance.

Agencies can receive anywhere between a month's and a day's notice that a new refugee will be arriving. No matter the timeframe, however, by the time a refugee arrives, an apartment has been rented and the required provisions are ready.

**Arrival.** Refugees' flights tend to arrive late at night. The agency caseworker will meet refugees at the airport and immediately take them to the apartment or that of a relative or friend, if so requested. At their new home, refugees are given a home and safety orientation. They are introduced to basics such as how the appliances work and how the doors lock and are given an overview of their new neighborhood. Refugees are also told where families who speak their same language are located, and they are given a "hot ethnic meal," as mandated by the State Department. Oftentimes, the already resettled refugee community will cook for new arrivals.

**First 24 Hours.** Within 24 hours, the agency caseworker visits the home to make sure the first day is going well. Refugees are given pocket money (\$20 per adult and \$10 per child) and are instructed to spend it on whatever they want. Caseworkers validate refugees' I-94 "Arrival-Departure Record" forms and make copies. These forms serve as the refugees' only form of ID, and allow them to get Social Security cards.

**Days 2 through 5.** Refugees are taken to the Onondaga County Department of Social Services (DSS) to apply for cash, medical and food assistance. This assistance is federally funded, but run through the local DSS. Refugees are taken to the Syracuse City School District's RAP where they are

given English oral proficiency tests and scheduled for health screenings; children eligible for K-12 education are enrolled in school. Caseworkers orient refugees to their neighborhoods and take them shopping for food and necessities.

**Days 6 through 7.** Employment assessments are conducted for adults able to work and any referrals are made. Each resettlement agency offers employment assistance. The goal is for refugees to be employed within five months.

**Before day 14.** By this time, refugees must have applied for Social Security cards. Also, all eligible males must sign up for the Selective Service System (the military draft) within 30 days of arrival.

**Within 2 to 3 months.** Children begin school and adults start English education classes at RAP, plus any conversational groups or other informal language exposure and instruction.

**Within 90 days.** Refugees must undergo the New York State mandated Refugee Health Assessment. This is coordinated by RAP. After the initial physical, if the refugee is relatively healthy, he or she wouldn't return to the physician until 9 months or a year later, just as it would be for anyone else. Some refugees will be receiving mental health counseling, but probably not as many as who need it, given their traumatic experiences in wars and refugee camps.

**After 90 days.** Agencies are required to provide up to 90 days of services to refugees, but since this is such a short period of time for resettlement, the agencies do offer some help past this period.

**Fourth through sixth month.** The goal is for refugees to have a job by now. Services of JOBSplus!, an agency partner of DSS that provides employment assistance, begin for refugees who receive public assistance. Resettlement Agencies continue to provide case management support as needed. Also, refugees who accepted interest-free travel loans to cover their airfare to the United States must begin to repay the loans six months after their arrival.

**Seventh month through end of first year.** By the end of the first year, residency has been established, and this allows eligible refugees to take advantage of Onondaga Community College. Refugees can also apply for permanent residency status, also known as Green Cards.

**Second and Third Years.** Refugees continue to learn English, attend school, work, and adjust to life in Syracuse.

**Year Four.** The travel loans for airfare to the U.S. must be repaid within 46 months if refugees have not applied for deferment or waivers.

**Year Five.** The process to citizenship can begin after a refugee has lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident for 4 years, 9 months. The process has many stages beginning with a naturalization application accompanied by a \$680 filing fee, fingerprinting at the local US Citizenship and Immigration Services Office (USCIS), and exam preparation classes, which are offered locally. When the steps are successfully completed, a naturalization interview is scheduled and the applicant takes the civics and English exams—all conducted in Buffalo, the USCIS District office. If the

refugee is successful, he or she will have a scheduled date to take the "Oath of Allegiance." Swearing in ceremonies usually take place at the Syracuse courthouse.

## *Local Resettlement Process*

### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Department of State visits resettlement agencies every five years to monitor services, and during their last visit in 2011, according to Helen Malina of InterFaith Works, "They were so impressed by the deep and real and rich collaboration in this community." The Study Committee finds that the two resettlement agencies, along with RAP, handle the demands of many refugees in a caring and cooperative manner. The heads of the three programs meet with each other regularly and help each other as needed. The federally mandated resettlement process is overwhelming and involves the complex coordination of multiple service providers, institutions and individuals. This intricate network can be confusing to those providing the services—one can only imagine how a refugee must feel. As can be seen by the timeline each refugee has multiple contacts and appointments in their initial days and weeks – even the simple act of transporting each refugee, and their extended family, involves each staff member, for often they drive the refugees in their own cars to appointments.

Local resettlement agencies have little power to make changes to the steps in the mandated process, except for helping refugees go through it as smoothly as possible. Improvement must lie in simplifying Syracuse's end of the resettlement process as much as possible. The improvement of the process should also extend to timely and regular communication of the numbers and needs of the refugees and other data to the many other organizations, such as the county health department, that also aims to serve this unique population.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to basic needs such as additional resources for organizations that offer services to refugees, we recommend several other steps. Suggestions include:

- A single, cohesive refugee services center that provides a single location for the refugees to go for information, services, meetings, medical appointments and classes would simplify the resettlement process for refugees. With transportation a hindrance to accessing services, one center for all or most of the refugees' essential resettlement needs would greatly ease some of the complexity and stress on both refugees and agency staffs.
- The two resettlement agencies should hold a meeting of all local government and other refugee service agencies at the beginning of the year, when they learn from their national organizations the likely number and origins of refugees slated to arrive in Syracuse in that year.
- The resettlement, service and local government agencies should also meet at least annually to assess the refugee resettlement process over the preceding year, reviewing the successes, problems, gaps, and suggestions for change.

- The resettlement agencies should also provide their partner agencies, volunteers, constituents and the media with relevant information about the new residents. The community would benefit from learning more about the refugees we are welcoming into our community – their nations of origin, why they left, what they have experienced.
- The resettlement agencies, as first point of contact, should establish a method to inform other stakeholders when a refugee family is expected.
- A “Syracuse: The World at Our Doorstep” website should be created with the dual purpose of 1) providing information on resources to individuals (from translators to sponsors to teachers) and organizations that serve the refugee populations; and 2) informing the community at large about refugees’ cultures and homelands through a series of profiles about different refugee populations and stories about individual new Americans here in Syracuse.

## SYRACUSE: A CITY SHAPED BY IMMIGRANTS

When asked by study committee members what the biggest difference is between contemporary refugees and Syracuse’s immigrant settlers, Onondaga Historical Association historian Dennis Connors replied: “The recent patterns are more diverse in race and religion.” Early Syracuse immigrants were white and Christian and they assimilated more easily into the already settled community. Also, the job market was completely different. An immigrant could speak little English and/or be illiterate and could still find a job that would pay him enough money to support a family. But that doesn’t mean they didn’t face prejudice and hard times.

Syracuse’s early settlers (late 1700s and early 1800s) were primarily the British, Scottish, Irish, Germans, some free African Americans and some slave African Americans. By the latter half of the 1800s, German and Irish immigrants exceeded natural-born U.S. citizens in the Syracuse area. Early immigrants faced prejudice as well as poor living and working conditions, but could get a job and provide for their families relatively easily. Syracuse manufacturing was at its peak, and the salt fields provided the Irish community, in particular, with employment.

Many immigrants took leadership roles in local government and community groups, and the city and county politics encouraged such involvement. Politicians wanted registered voters as their supporters, and to become a registered voter, an immigrant had to become a citizen. So how immigrants assimilated into the local culture was in part nurtured by the politics of the time. Also, within a generation or two, immigrants were more fully “assimilated”; ethnic neighborhoods shifted and changed, and as new immigrants came into Syracuse, more established groups moved further into the suburbs.

Italians started arriving in Syracuse in the 1880s, attracted to the plentitude of construction and railroad work, and by 1899, more than 5,000 Italian-born residents were living in the city. They had created a Little Italy downtown near where Dinosaur Bar-B-Que is now located. Over time, Italian-Americans moved to Salina and State streets, replacing the German-Americans who moved northeast. By 1930, more than 30,000 Syracuse residents were either first- or second- or third-generation Italian-American.

French Canadians moved into Syracuse around the 1900s, as did Jewish immigrants, particularly from Russia, Poland and other Eastern-European nations. The Jewish population primarily settled in the “tenement area” of Syracuse, in the southeast quarter. These families faced tremendous prejudice as they created the city’s tailoring industry.

Ethnic neighborhoods shifted as their population and local wealth grew, and this meant that “traditional” ethnic trades and job opportunities expanded as well. As communities prospered, they could afford to build and establish places of worship, and

these developments helped newly arriving immigrants feel more at home. The downside, though, was that ethnic neighborhoods encouraged a form of isolation, as immigrants stayed within the areas they felt most comfortable or welcomed.

Syracuse had already become a city to help its newcomers, as many nonprofit organizations assisted immigrants, including the Salvation Army, Rescue Mission, and YMCA. Immigrants in dire need could turn to the county “poor house.”

By the 1920s, as many 10,000 Polish immigrants were living in the area, making them the dominant ethnic group. Also by this time, there were around 1,200 African Americans living in Syracuse. And although the city was known for its abolitionism, it doesn’t mean fugitive slaves felt safe. After the Jerry Rescue in Syracuse, an event in 1851 when a fugitive slave was arrested then freed in a public rescue by a crowd of abolitionists, many fugitive slaves moved from Syracuse to Canada for greater security. Free blacks faced discrimination post-Civil War, and this tended to limit their employment opportunities to menial labor jobs. Many immigrants viewed African Americans as rivals for employment.

By the 1960s, most of the city’s African-American population lived in what was known as the 15th Ward, which was “virtually the only place blacks were allowed to live,” Connors said. By 1970, the African-American population rose to 23,000, and by 1990, it was 33,000.

With the passing of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act of 1975, the United States began accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia, and Syracuse welcomed its first wave of Vietnamese refugees in 1978. They were mainly resettled on Syracuse’s North Side, for similar reasons as to why contemporary refugees are resettled there—affordable housing and the neighborhoods’ history of welcoming a diverse range of immigrants.

In 1978, the Syracuse City School District created the “Refugee Family Program” to help the incoming students, and Catholic Charities formed its Refugee Resettlement Program. In 1981, the InterReligious Council, now known as InterFaith Works, began its resettlement program.<sup>31</sup>

Over the next decade, Syracuse welcomed more than 1,100 Southeast Asian refugees, and in 1989, *The Post-Standard* reported that they had made the North Side home by creating a “little Saigon” with stores and restaurants and other businesses.<sup>32</sup> The refugees had continued the tradition of helping to shape the North Side as more established immigrant and ethnic groups left the area.<sup>33</sup>

As the United States clarified and expanded its refugee resettlement policies, Syracuse welcomed refugees from countries all over the world, and these men, women and children continue to help shape our community as they make the city their home.



## English Literacy

*Leah\* grew up in the Congo. At sixteen, she became the wife of a man nearly a decade her senior and began bearing children.* Not yet 30 years old, she is now the proud mother of five children and still in her childbearing years. While she is a woman who has seen much, who brought her children through Tanzania all the way across the ocean to build a new life, opportunity is somewhat of a new word to Leah.

When Leah walked into our Hopeprint Home on the Northside, she had never attended school. As is true of many of the women in the world, she had not been given the gift of an education, leaving her not only with a lack of English, but literacy, period. I remember the first weeks she timidly stepped into our home, walking in the shadow of her gregarious and smiley friend who owned the room upon entry. A “hello” would sometimes eek from her mouth, but any other words were met with confused looks and glances to her Congolese sisters for translation.

Six months later, Leah is a different woman. Week after week, she has walked nearly a mile to our home with her five children for English. I once commented on how far she walked, and her only response was: “I love English!”

Now, not only can Leah carry on a conversation in English, but she also has her first job. Before she came to the United States, she was a woman with no education and no work experience; now she is experiencing both, and the confidence in her step is markedly different.

As I learn more about her life each week, I am all the more convinced of the power of investing in lives by offering English lessons and relationships. These tools are transforming Leah’s life. One evening of English with volunteers who care about her each week and people to love and care for her kids is making all the difference.

—Nicole Watts, founder and executive director of Hopeprint Home

\*name changed

*“You really have to immerse yourself in the language, in the culture, to understand English,” said former Bosnian refugee, Dzenan Selimovic.* For him, this includes home life, too.

He and his wife, who was born and raised on the Northside, speak only English at home so that their young children are raised in an English-speaking family. They spoke Bosnian at home when their oldest son, who is now 10, was learning how to talk, and Selimovic didn’t like how it affected his son’s education. His son was placed in English as a Second Language classes, and Selimovic thought this was a “set-back,” that it separated his son from other native Syracusans. “We don’t live in Bosnia,” he said. “I want my kids to feel a part of Syracuse.” So, he and his wife decided to only speak English at home. There is so much to learn, he said. Even after 15 years of living in Syracuse, Selimovic thinks he doesn’t pronounce some words correctly or use the appropriate tone for certain words and phrases. His wife has told him this makes him sound as if he’s angry when he isn’t—he’s just not speaking English with the same intonations as a native speaker might. “I’m very proud of being from the Balkans.” But, he added, he doesn’t want his children to feel as if they need to do anything extra to appear American. They are American. They were born and raised here. And him? “I’m American. I feel very much American... with a Bosnian sensibility.”

### *Learning English*

Being able to speak, read and write English is a critical component in resettlement success. Knowing the language impacts everything, from communicating with physicians to doing well in school to gaining employment to interacting with landlords to making new friends. Central New York has a diverse web of local literacy resources—from formal classes to casual conversation groups—that offers refugees flexible learning opportunities, but the complexity of options may be too overwhelming for some refugees to navigate. Of course, the numerous offerings not only



show how important English is, but also show how difficult the language can be to learn, particularly for men, women and children who were not literate in their native language before coming to Syracuse.

After an initial intake interview with the Syracuse City School District’s Refugee Assistance Program (RAP), most adult refugees begin English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at RAP. Refugees may also find their way to classes at other providers such as Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse, North Side Learning Center, Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center and West Side Learning Center—who will then test refugees’ oral English skills and enroll them in appropriate classes. Children eligible for K-12 education are enrolled in school during this intake interview and scheduled for testing by a school district ESL teacher at another site. English instruction for children then takes place at their own schools, once they officially begin. It may take a month or so for refugees to begin classes as the family gets settled in Syracuse and completes the mandated health screenings.

The demand for English instruction has increased, said Horton. A few years ago, RAP only ran eight classes daily; now it offers 24 classes. This demand for ESL education reflects a national trend. Horton said that in general, refugees are eager to learn English. And while some refugees may fall through the cracks and miss their classes, the courses are well attended. If classes are full at RAP, students are referred to other services providers.

How long does it take to learn English? There is no one answer to this question, according to Theresa Pagano, director of the Westside Learning Center. Fluency and literacy depends on the individual’s life experiences, culture (how language was used), amount of formal education, emotional state, motivation, and welcoming nature of the new community. The answer also depends on the level of English acquisition measured: Conversational? Reading? Writing? Academic literacy? The complexity of English and

all of its applications makes the rate of attaining “fluency” difficult to determine. Mark Cass—former vice president at ProLiteracy, an international literacy organization, and a board member at North Side Learning Center, which offers classes to refugees—said that refugees’ progress with learning English is a “capacity issue” in the “broadest sense.” Refugees are trying to fit learning English in with everything else in their busy lives. Also, many refugees’ cultures never emphasized the reading and writing of their own language, so learning English becomes particularly challenging. Paul Ariik, a former refugee from Sudan who has been in Syracuse for 11 years, said it takes a “lifetime” to learn English.

### *Major Literacy Service Providers*

**Refugee Assistance Program (RAP—501 Park Street)**, informally known as Bob’s School after its longtime program director, tests adults with the Best Plus listening and speaking exam and places them in English classes within 30- 45 days. A written exam is only given if the refugee scores high on the oral exam. RAP currently offers 24 English classes (in levels 1 through 6) at various times of day to accommodate diverse schedules. At level six, a non-native English speaker should be able to have a “decent conversation” in English, said Horton. Once students move beyond level six, they graduate from RAP to pursue their English instruction elsewhere. Some advanced students have gone on from RAP to attend Onondaga Community College or Syracuse University. Most refugees, however, will go to one of the four major service providers listed below.

**Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse (LVGS; 100 New St.)** teaches people to read, write, and speak English. Students work with volunteer tutors and/or attend small group classes taught by credential instructors. Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse serves adults aged 16 and older functioning at or below the 6th grade level. Curriculum is learner-centered, focusing on individual goals and needs such as being able to communicate with a child’s teacher, getting a job, reading a bus schedule, etc. Students may remain with LVGS until testing indicates they are reading above a 6th grade level, after which they are referred to other local programs. It is not unusual for refugees to seek instruction with more than one program and students who do so are more likely to show educational gain. LVGS is supported by federal, state, and philanthropic funding.

**North Side Learning Center (808 North McBride St.)** offers English classes for adults and children as young as four years old; students are tested by the center before enrolled in classes, which follow the SCSD academic calendar. Currently, 150 refugees—from such countries as Burma, Somalia, Iraq, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Thailand, Congo, Mauritania, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Uganda—are served by the center. Students are tested twice a year to determine progress, and when adults pass the intermediate level, they are also evaluated to see if they can begin business classes, taught by Syracuse University volunteers, to coach refugees in how to become entrepreneurs.

**Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center** (EOC; 100 New St.) could be another stop for refugees after RAP. The EOC serves economically underprivileged individuals aged 17 and older who have been residents of NYS for at least 12 months. Exceptions to the residency rule include refugees, asylees and parolees. Refugees without the necessary documentation of economic status are assisted by EOC to determine eligibility. Because the agency is state-funded, learners are given a State-mandated language exam. Students not ready for an EOC-level class are first referred to Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse, located in the same building. Students who pass the test are placed into beginning or advanced ESL classes. Students might be in these classes for three years, as learners study at their own pace. Classes focus on English mechanics, grammar, syntax, idioms, etc. The EOC tries to prepare students for academic success, going to college or earning a General Educational Development diploma (GED).

**West Side Learning Center** (422 Gifford St.) assesses refugees' conversational English skills with the same test that RAP gave them within seven days of their arrival. After the evaluation, each student receives a learning plan. Classes teach English grammar and mechanics, as well as practical learning experiences in the community. For example, students might visit a local grocery store and the English lesson then incorporates the experience. This locally applicable approach to English instruction helps encourage students to have a "voice in your community," according Theresa Pagano, director of the center. It helps build students' confidence, and without a high level of comfort, Pagano said, the language "isn't going to come."

In addition to these major service providers, formal and informal English classes are offered at and through: Onondaga County Public Libraries, independent non-profit organizations, Ethnic Based Community Organizations, Syracuse University literacy volunteers, neighborhood centers, community gardens, religious groups and more. CNYLearns.org is an adult literacy program online reference tool for learners and others in the community developed by



the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County and ProLiteracy to provide the current schedule of adult literacy instructional program offerings, locations and hours of instruction, websites, a Google map and a primary phone contact. It has a search function so that learners have a method for seeing all that is available in Onondaga County.

## *English Literacy Services*

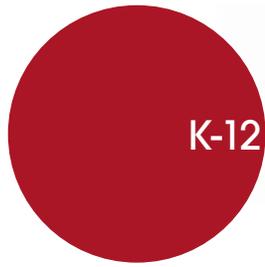
### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

As perhaps befits a community where the literacy movement was founded, there is a richness of opportunities for English as a Second Language classes at a variety of levels. The diversity of classes, groups and tutors represent Syracuse's understanding of how important literacy is to a refugee's success. However, the path to full literacy in English for adults is not always easy for a newcomer to find or follow. There seems to be no one source that knows all of the options, or the best option for progression for an individual.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Providers should share resources to create a clearer, more organized and cohesive literacy service network.
- English language learners (ELLs) represent a broad and diverse range of students. More consideration should be given to which types of English literacy curricula are the best for refugee learners, who have survived considerable trauma and are repairing their lives here in Syracuse as they try to learn English.
- A system of showing all the literacy programs that are available, and a method of tracking where there are openings for different skill levels would be helpful for assisting refugees to improve their language skills, and to ensure that use of available services is maximized.
- All opportunities whereby English as a Second Language lessons can be included informally or casually should be explored and encouraged.





## K-12 Education

*“In fact it was not easy to start education for me here in the U.S. with people who never experienced any problem, but for me, who has experienced misery right from the age of ten. However, thanks to the generosity and kindness of the people who helped me to go and pass through, I am trying to do my best.”*

—Yassin Hussein, Ethiopian refugee at Fowler High School

*“American kids are better prepared to become global leaders because of their exposure in school to people from other countries and practices of other cultures.”*

Sharon Birnkrant, principal of H.W. Smith School, a City K-8 school that has long had a concentration of international students requiring ESL services.

*Tan\**, a 9-year-old refugee from Burma, attended summer refugee academy and entered school in September. Tan had no problems interacting with his peers or following the routine of the summer academy. He seemed eager to go to school, and he was placed in a classroom with another Burmese youth.

The academic coach accompanied him to school on the first day and walked him to the classroom. Although quiet and timid, he sat down at his desk and appeared to be settling in. At the end of the day, however, the classroom teacher reported that he had become upset for a while and cried. This behavior continued into the second day and deteriorated even further the third day, as he ran from the room and tried to leave the school. The school called Catholic Charities’ academic coach, who immediately went to the school. Tan was in the front office crying hysterically and trying to escape the hold of the staff person restraining him. With the help of a translator, the academic coach was able to calm Tan down and convince him to return to his

classroom. The teacher was puzzled that he became so upset over her directions, but felt that perhaps he was frightened at being separated from the only other Burmese child in her class, even if only for a few minutes.

Tan continued to have episodes of crying and difficult behavior over the next several weeks. He seemed to be having a very difficult time adjusting to school, and he made it clear that he did not want to be there. Academically, he didn’t seem to be learning. The academic coach visited him regularly at school. She also arranged for a therapist from Catholic Charities to meet with him weekly at the school. Slowly, Tan began to feel more at ease in his classroom. The crying episodes decreased and eventually disappeared. As he became more comfortable, his schoolwork improved immensely. By the end of the first semester, Tan was interacting well with his classmates and making consistent academic progress. School is now a place where Tan wants to be.

\*name changed

—Catholic Charities website; Refugee Youth Outreach Program

As new refugee populations come into the city, the district’s ELL population changes. Currently, Burmese refugees represent the largest student-refugee population, and Myanmar (Burma) is the No. 2 country of origin for ELLs (16 percent of ELLs are from Myanmar). Spanish-speaking students from Puerto Rico comprise the largest group of ELLs (29 percent).

When 18-year-old Liberian refugee Majay Abu Donzo graduated from Fowler High School in June 2011, she had already transformed her five years of living in the United States into success: Not only had she earned her high school diploma, but she had also become the school’s salutatorian.

Her achievement made local headlines. “In my country,” the new graduate told Columnist Sean Kirst of *The Post-Standard*, “only the rich children know they’ll get an education. The rest of us would do anything to get one.” Donzo is now a sophomore at Marist College.

While five of the city’s ten valedictorians and salutatorians in 2011 were refugees, the challenges refugee students face are numerous and mighty. This rocky transition into the U.S. school system isn’t unique to Syracuse, however. It would be difficult for refugees who resettle anywhere nationwide. One of the reasons refugees are resettled in Syracuse is because the resettlement agencies have strong partnerships with the SCSD.<sup>34</sup>

### Nationality Workers

To offer additional assistance to refugees and other ELLs, the SCSD K–12 employs six nationality workers, five of whom are refugees. Combined, they speak more than 12 languages. Nationality workers assist students with registration, provide support during their first days of school and transitioning into the district, and act as liaisons between the schools and families. “We do what we need to do, so every child is getting his education,” said Pothwei Bangosoth, a nationality worker from Sudan. If a child hasn’t been in school for several days, Bangosoth will contact the family. He speaks English, Dinka and Arabic.

## *In Depth: The Syracuse City School District*

Of the 20,754 students in the district, around 12 percent (or 2,462 students) are ELLs. ELLs speak a total of 74 different languages and represent 80 countries. Of these students, approximately 50 percent are refugees, according to Mayra Todd, SCSD's ELL director. Other ELLs are: secondary refugees/migrants; immigrants; or individuals who were born in the United States, but grew up in a home in which a language other than English is spoken. Of smaller numbers are foreign-born children adopted by U.S. parents, and children of professionals from other countries who are temporarily living in Syracuse for professional or educational reasons.

"There's been tremendous growth of ELLs in our district," says Jackie LeRoy, an ELL teacher with the SCSD who presented the ELL program to the study committee, and this increase reflects a national trend.

When a new family arrives, the district reviews the child's education history including the student's records (if available), along with interviews with the family by one of six SCSD nationality workers.

Students are tested before enrollment and then assessed each spring with the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test. Attaining fluency in a new language is a lengthy process for anyone. Conversational fluency can be acquired within two years; academic may take five to seven years. But, if the student has had no formal schooling, academic fluency may take seven to ten years.

With the early evaluations, the district tries to determine not only the student's English language proficiency, but also his or her knowledge of academic content.

New students are generally placed in a grade based upon their age, rather than their proficiency in subject areas. Refugees and other ELLs aren't given special consideration, even though it may take them longer to learn academic content as they learn English. No Child Left Behind Act and New York State assessments apply to all students and schools regardless of a student's language proficiency or a school's ELL population.

In the past, the SCSD's refugee population was smaller and some teachers did not have any exposure to ELL's, so may not have challenged them in the classroom as much as English-speaking students because of the communication gap. However, as the population of ELL's is increasing, more and more teachers are faced with the need for additional professional development to learn strategies to challenge these students. How to merge content instruction with language instruction is challenging. To assist with extra instructional demands ELL students place on the SCSD, New York State does provide some Title III grant funding for supplemental instructional programming and materials.

Currently, ELLs are pulled out of content classes (most often out of language arts at the elementary school level and English at the high school level), for approximately 35 minutes of English language instruction. ELL classes are traditionally small, with teacher to student ratios of about

## Older Refugee Children

Students need 22 credits to graduate from high school. For teen-aged refugees and other ELLs who may be too old to earn the required number of credits by the time they are 21 (the age at which New York state says a student can no longer be in high school), the SCSD offers a career academy, General Educational Development (GED) prep and literacy training at the Sidney L. Johnson Vocational Center (573 E. Genesee St.). Consider, for example, a refugee who enters the district at the age of 19 with no high school credits. Based on our experience, it would be unlikely for this student to earn the 22 credits within two years as he or she learns English, said Jackie LeRoy, an ELL teacher within the district. This student would then be recommended for the academy. The district's first choice, however, is to have students enter school when possible.

1 to 10; the average ratio may be 1/20 to 1/30 in high schools. Todd said the district is trying to move away from pulling students out of content instruction for ELL time. Having translators for every classroom is not fiscally possible and finding trained individuals is a challenge all public schools face. Incorporating the use of technology is an avenue being explored. An initiative this year, she said, is to utilize translanguaging—incorporating more home language into the classroom for processing purposes. The students negotiate a concept or idea with others or independently in their home language. There are discussions or questions around the ideas or concepts in the home language and the ultimate reporting out is in English. Allowing students to bring commonalities from their home language into concepts that are universal (like weather) can help develop academic English.

Gaining a better understanding of how ELLs learn is one of the steps toward improving the classroom environment. Some students facing academic literacy challenges—along with the shock of a new culture, school, peers, home—can become withdrawn in the main classroom, and this can puzzle and even upset some teachers. The teacher may think the student has a developmental learning difference, when, in fact, the behavior is normal for an ELL. Todd said most teachers want to be the best they can be for their students, and they can become frustrated when they feel they lack the skills and/or knowledge to assist all of their students. Some teachers have asked for extra training, and the district does offer continuing education courses, but participation by teachers is voluntary. ELL teachers are specially certified. Todd said that any mandate for all district teachers to receive ELL training would have to involve a teachers' bargaining unit/union discussion.

Despite all of these academic fluency hurdles, teachers with refugees in their classrooms usually ask for more, because they usually find these students to be respectful, thankful and eager to learn. "It's really hard to put a finger on why ELLs are so successful," LeRoy said. One reason could be ELL students' motivation. "For the most part,"

she said, “[ELLs] end up becoming the role models in their schools.”

Fowler’s Majay Abu Donzo was taught by her father to honor and value education, and that it was the key to success. In her graduation speech at the John H. Mulroy Civic Center in Syracuse, she told the crowd: “The world is at our feet. Why are we waiting so long to pick it up?”<sup>35</sup>

### ***Up Close: Refugee Students***

Refugee children are like any other children with the emotional, physical and developmental needs plus the desires of youth. Add to this the traumatic experiences of leaving their homelands (or being born in a refugee camp), atrocities witnessed or endured, plus the complexities of wanting to “fit in” with their American peers while living with family who fear the loss of its own culture, and the needs of refugee children become heightened.

School and afterschool programs can act as stabilizing factors, with the structure and routines of a classroom and activities where children can direct their energies. To help refugee students’ transition into the district, Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program has a Refugee Youth Outreach Program at their Northside location to provide recreation, tutoring, homework assistance, and other supports to refugee children. The program also offers a six-week summer refugee academy to introduce new students to school and prepares them for the fall. Refugees are taught basic English expressions that would help them navigate the school during the first few days—such as how to say, “Hello,” or ask where the cafeteria is located. A shortened version of the academy is also offered during the school year, as refugees can arrive at any time of the year.

While individual schools or classrooms may hold their own orientations, the SCSD offers no mandated orientation to children or their families about the district or the U.S. educational system. Todd said this is a weakness. Some information about the U.S. educational system is included in the initial *Welcome to the United States* resettlement guidebook that refugees are to be given when they arrive, as well as in videos owned by the school district, but the orientations aren’t specific to Syracuse.

The first few days of school can be the most difficult, and resettlement agencies try to help refugee children get to where they need to be. Tara Causgrove, the refugee youth case manager at Catholic Charities Northside CYO, usually escorts children to school the first day to make sure they are settled. The CYO acts as a liaison between teachers and families, similar to SCSD nationality workers. Parents sometimes come along that first day, because it may be the only time they get to see the school; lack of transportation and difficulty in leaving work can prevent them from being able to visit at other times.

A large portion of the CYO’s work the first few weeks of school is making sure students get on the correct buses. Many bus routes have multiple buses traveling them, and it can be difficult to know which side of the street to stand on and which bus to get on. Before the CYO escorted children

to buses, many would get on the wrong bus and show up at the wrong schools. Then, the days were spent “trading kids,” Castricone said.

“I perfectly remember my first day in school,” said Yassin Hussein, an Ethiopian refugee and Fowler High School student. He was nervous about speaking English and what other students would think of his accent. But, he said, the “massive support” from classmates and teachers helped with his transition.

### ***K-12 Education***

#### **STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS**

New Americans have the potential to bring a wealth of positive benefits to our schools and community, and their arrival should be celebrated as an opportunity for learning.

Schools are positioned to be an immensely positive influence and stabilizing factor for those newly arrived refugees and their families. The Syracuse City School District works very hard to serve the needs of the many students who don’t speak English fluently. The needs of refugees are added to the needs of many other non-English speaking people who live in the community. The refugee assistance programs do their best to help the students adjust and thrive; their efforts should be encouraged and expanded. SCSD engagement with the other providers in the community-wide refugee dynamic appears to be limited, the work of RAP notwithstanding.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To maximize the school district’s ability to help refugee students succeed, refugee students should be placed in schools with the type of ELL resources to best serve them. In addition, schools should be creative in scheduling ESL classes to minimize the disruption of students’ attendance in content area classes.
- To assist students’ adjustment to school, all students should receive a comprehensive orientation, and ideally, if a need is perceived, new students should be paired with a peer “buddy” in the school for help and guidance.
- All SCSD teachers should receive training on how ELLs learn best, the signs of learning difficulties, and the signs of need for cultural adjustment. Native languages should be incorporated into academic learning as much as possible.
- As refugee students from a variety of vastly different countries and refugee camp experiences arrive in our community, teachers, principals and staff should be provided with background information on the nations of origin and an understanding of what situations their students may have experienced and what adjustment to a new life is like, through presentations and workshop opportunities at the school and district levels.
- SCSD representatives should connect more closely with other stakeholders and participate in community-wide task forces or other efforts to enhance the district’s work to improve the English-language learning progress of refugee students.



## Housing: Establishing New Roots

*“The Northside strives for unity through diversity, maintaining our traditions and promoting family values; we celebrate our history as a home of many cultures.”*

—City of Syracuse,  
Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today Website

*“I researched the history and basic culture of these new Nepalese immigrants because I was looking for responsible tenants.* I did a lot of online looking into sites that explained their plight and flight from Nepal and found that the meaning of poverty in American society is greatly exaggerated in comparison. I was in the process of preparing my only 2 apartment houses for sale, because I had given up on trying to get good tenants in this particular area of the North Side of Syracuse. After meeting the refugees and talking to them (most do not speak English), I decided to take in one family in October 2011 to see how it would work out. By May of 2012, all of my 4 apartments are rented by Bhutanese families. Their needs are simple and the culture of family and faith they bring to the neighborhood is refreshing and infectious.

The challenges began with trying to help supplement Catholic Charities with basic household goods. The friends in my social network responded with an amazing amount of support with household items: beds, hundreds of articles of clothing and even bicycles, etc. The challenges they brought with them to apartment living have been many. Their previous living conditions were [primitive], with rationed food, bamboo huts with no plumbing whatsoever and no electricity. Our basic style of cleanliness and personal hygiene is still alien to them in terms of knowing how to use and take care of a bathroom, our methods of cleaning, vacuuming, washing and drying clothes and even managing the trash. Even after one year, Blue Bins remain an enigma to them. In a nutshell, shall we say that they have raised the level of normal tenants’ wear and tear to a new art form. Towels and clean counter surfaces and floors are a rare sight by our standards. Personal hygiene also needs to be addressed, but

as a landlord and now as their friend, I cannot insinuate myself into these matters and feel embarrassed to address the subject. I do wish however, that their orientation by RAP would put this issue at the top of their list for I am sure that the young people in school, especially the girls, are going to suffer chastisement and be ostracized by their peers.

This being said, I accept the responsibility to educate them in basic living habits acceptable in the American context. The beauty of their culture, respect for their faith and for all religions and their tolerance for human weakness reminds me of what I was taught by my church and my parents, and their care for the elderly is beyond reproach. Their entire community is like one huge family, and they cannot understand why we would ever put a dear loved one in a nursing home. I drew up a set of dwelling rules and even ordered 3 Nepalese–English dictionaries (hard to find). I posted the list of rules on the kitchen cabinet and had some translated into Nepalese. The children and young adults are very, very well educated by our standards and understand English. Sadly, though, I later learned that most of the adults could not even read or write their own language let alone English, and are embarrassed by it. I am doing my part to acclimate them to American society while recognizing and preserving the best they bring to America. One of these was to provide them with pocket U.S. Constitutions. I was even able to secure an online copy of the U.S. Constitution translated into Nepalese from the American Embassy in Kathmandu.

In a sense, they have given me new purpose and direction. These are future U.S. citizens, and I am doing my best to help them be proud and deserving citizens. This includes finding them work. The single, most frustrating roadblock to their assimilation and success regarding adults of working age, is the lack of effective education in our language. Even some school age kids need to work harder at it, especially in the home.”

—Bob Murfitt, landlord

**Syracuse’s Historic Gateway**—On Lodi Street, a garden now grows in a vacant lot: *Karibu* Community Garden. *Karibu* means welcome in Swahili, and the idea for the garden began when a Congolese refugee approached Northside Urban Partnership (Northside UP; 800 North Salina St.) asking for help to find farmland. Many refugees come from agrarian communities, and the urge to dig into the earth and plant seeds is strong, even in the middle of the city. The refugee’s request harvested more than *Karibu* gardens’ potatoes, carrots and *lenga-lenga* (a leaf vegetable native to Burundi). It helped revitalize a community, and it grew a community, as refugees weed and plant alongside native Syracusans. Community is what refugees desire, and many of them have found that on the city’s Northside.

Syracuse’s Northside is deeply rooted in immigrant history, and the trend continues in the 21st century as many refugees now call it home. Northside neighborhoods traditionally offer affordable housing with landlords that the resettlement agencies trust, and both agencies have offices on the Northside.

Some have wondered whether the concentration of refugees to specific neighborhoods is beneficial to the city and to refugees, and whether or not it would be better to expand resettlement into other areas. Resettlement agencies have reported that the success of this can vary by a refugee’s ethnicity. Some refugees, for example, may not want to be near their fellow countrymen, but others do.

Josh Eberle, a Syracuse University law student, who helped manage the Syracuse Refugee Landlord Association at InterFaith Works Center for New Americans, said he tried to settle three refugee families on the Southside, and within two weeks they broke the lease and moved back to the Northside, where other refugees from the same country are concentrated and can offer social support. There are safety concerns with being an ethnic and/or religious minority, and refugees may feel particularly vulnerable on their own. In addition, many refugees rely on public transportation, and living in an area where ethnic grocery stores, restaurants and much-needed services are located eases their resettlement.

**Housing Issues**—The federal government mandates that housing must be found for refugees before they arrive in Syracuse. Resettlement agencies’ housing managers contract with landlords on behalf of the refugees, whose names go on the leases. The rent is paid with the federal funds agencies receive for refugee housing, and the apartment or house will be furnished with all utilities active by the time the refugees arrive. During the first few months, resettlement agencies act as property managers to resolve concerns between the new tenants and landlords, and refugees might not meet their landlords for several months. In fact, agencies have been known to act as a go-between for several years. This relationship seems to work well, as language and cultural barriers make communication difficult. Often a problem (such as a broken light bulb or a question about why the house is so cold in winter when the heat is up to 90 degrees, but all of the windows are open—an example of cultural misunderstanding) can be resolved by the agency before a landlord has



to get involved. This makes some landlords eager to rent to refugees, but agencies are careful about where they place the newcomers.

Patrick King, housing manager at InterFaith Works Center for New Americans, said the agency maintains an approved landlord list, and he’s always looking to build new relationships with good property owners. Many have worked hard to get apartments ready on extremely short notice, and remain faithful to the program even when a refugee’s arrival date unexpectedly changes. Some landlords are former refugees—from Vietnam, Bosnia, Russia and Laos, for example—and “they love renting to refugees,” he said.

The Center for New Americans does have housing concerns in regards to refugees, however, and it submitted this list to the city of Syracuse Department of Neighborhood and Business Development:

- Need for large apartments (at least three bedrooms)
- Need for affordable and/or subsidized rental apartments
- Landlords who frequently refuse to refund security deposits even when tenant obligations have been met
- Landlords who frequently fail to respond to normal requests (e.g., repair of broken windows or nonworking appliances)
- Frequent vandalism to refugees’ cars, parked on streets or in driveways
- Need for affordable and safe housing for singles
- Need for legal advocacy in reference to housing that can adapt and work with language barriers and cultural differences
- Need for education on adapting to an American lifestyle in reference to housing, community services, and social behaviors<sup>36</sup>

Refugees are free to continue renting their first apartment as long as they want, and many do. Others choose to move to different housing and establish their own independent relationship with landlords. Because some refugees live multi-generationally and some have large families, the demand for three-to-five bedroom apartments exceeds the supply. This is particularly true for families seeking public housing (refugees are not settled into public housing initially). The majority of public housing for families is on

the Southside, and there aren't many larger units. As the Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) builds new properties, they are keeping an eye to the changing needs of the community, according to David Paccone, senior management analyst at SHA. Large family needs have influenced plans for current and future developments. When applying for public housing, refugees complete an application and are placed on waiting lists just like other community members, he said. Refugees do not receive preferential standing because of their refugee status, though because they may have fewer disqualifying factors (criminal records, bad landlord references, past SHA debts), they may be more apt to pass background checks.

A significant number of Somali Bantu live in SHA's Central Village, which has a number of larger units. The Housing Authority has assisted the Somali Bantu there to establish their own organization so that the more established residents could help ease resettlement and acculturation issues among the new residents; the Somali group also has a community space where they provide English classes and other services. The group is being encouraged to broaden its participation in existing tenant organizations to help further integrate the population. SHA is also working to improve the cultural competency of its staff in the housing projects where refugees reside.

The waiting list for Section 8 vouchers for non-public, subsidized housing numbers about 8,000, according to Paccone, and is a testament to the lack of affordable quality housing in Syracuse for low-income people. Paul Driscoll, Syracuse's commissioner for neighborhood and business development, said the city has been working with developers on projects on the Northside that would include rent-controlled units, and some should have four bedrooms. Still, he would like to find ways to help private landlords make improvements to their properties, so that more housing options would be available.

In terms of problems with landlords, the city said it tries to mitigate some of this with its Landlord Training and Weed and Seed programs, which aim to educate landlords on their rights and responsibilities.<sup>37</sup> Also, InterFaith Works facilitates the Syracuse Refugee Landlord Association, in which property owners can meet to discuss concerns.

Recognizing the differences between various refugee populations can also ease difficulties, said Eberle. For example, a Bosnian refugee who once lived in a home similar to what you'd find in Syracuse would have an easier transition with the home environment, than would a Burmese refugee who had never before seen a gas stove or used a light switch. "Training has to be tailored to individual groups," he said.

**Home ownership**—Refugees don't just want to rent homes, though, they would like to make their roots permanent by owning the properties in which they live. CNN Money ranked Syracuse eighth in its "most affordable U.S. cities to buy a home" in 2012.<sup>38</sup> Housing affordability is one of the reasons why refugees are resettled in Syracuse: It makes it easier for newcomers with little means to establish long-term residency. But there are many challenges.

Refugees lack credit history, may not have enough money for a down payment and can find the home buying process difficult to navigate. So, creative solutions often have to be found.

For Harith Alnoamy, an Iraqi refugee who came to Syracuse with his family in 2009, the challenge came in finding an interest-free loan; his Islamic religion forbids him from paying interest on money borrowed. "It is a sin to pay interest," he said. Fortunately, his landlord, who was selling the property, offered to serve as the mortgage. This allowed Alnoamy to make a down payment and pay monthly mortgage installments interest-free. The house is now in his name. While he was able to buy a piece of the American dream, he thinks he was lucky to find a solution and other refugees may not be as successful.

Some local lenders are stepping in to assist low-income families with special needs. Susan Hamilton, a loan officer at Syracuse Cooperative Federal Credit Union, has helped many immigrant and refugee families purchase homes. Syracuse Cooperative offers a matching savings account program to qualifying first-time homebuyers. The program requires one-on-one counseling about home ownership, and when the account holder has saved up \$1,875, the credit union matches it four times, giving them \$7,500. The future homeowner now has \$9,375—or 20% down on a mortgage for an entry-level home in Syracuse. Also, all of Syracuse Cooperative services are bilingual—Spanish and English.

## Housing

### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

Throughout Syracuse affordable quality housing remains an issue for native born and refugee alike. Entities such as the Refugee Landlord Association and Cooperative Federal offer great examples and evidence of seeing refugee tenants and homeowners as assets to the community. More needs to be done to inform both landlords and tenants of their respective rights and responsibilities as mutual caretakers of the housing units and to encourage landlords to invest in properties to create more quality rental housing.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The City of Syracuse should continue to work on options to help landlords bring housing up to code, rehabilitate existing housing, especially larger, affordable rental units for large families.
- Housing agencies should continue to take a proactive approach to refugee and landlord concerns. This could include cultural competency training of housing agency maintenance and programming staff; referral to those landlords who have experience renting to refugees; information and encouragement to other property owners; and ongoing assistance to familiarize refugees to tenant rights and responsibilities.
- Refugees, who were forced to leave behind their property and belongings when fleeing their homelands, need creative solutions for home ownership, through housing agencies, banking and credit institutions and private lenders.



## Economic Opportunities And Jobs

*“Metropolitan areas have an opportunity to build the capacity of their workforce from within by investing in the human capital of immigrant residents.”*

—Conclusion from Audrey Singer’s Brookings Paper, “Investing in the Human Capital of Immigrants, Strengthening Regional Economies” Sept. 2012

Two powerful dynamics affect refugees’ employment opportunities: Recent refugees are more difficult to place in jobs—either because they lack English skills or have little to no formal education experience, or both—and there are fewer jobs available for low- to no-skilled workers. According to Dominic Robinson, director of the Northside UP, this lower job placement rate means that there is a “higher chance for refugees to need social services,” and so the community and refugees “have to get creative.”

During their first several months in Syracuse, refugees able to work are assisted in job placement by the two resettlement agencies and RAP. Anyone still unemployed after that time is referred to JOBSplus!, which provides employment assistance to all County residents who are on public assistance. JOBSplus! assigns each client to a job coach who helps find employment or job training opportunities, and suitable positions based on the person’s background, training and experience. While as a group, a higher percentage of refugees have skills making them more employable than the total population on temporary public assistance, DSS has seen an increase in the percentage of refugees needing assistance because of the weak economy. Some refugees, because they have spent most of their lives in a refugee camp, have had little access to education and training. Those who do find jobs are often the first let go, as the newest employees, when companies lay off workers. The increase in demands on services has put a strain on social services that receive no increase in resources to help.

In better economic times, said Felicia Castricone, the program director for Catholic Charities’ refugee resettlement program, it seemed there weren’t *enough* refugees to fill the city’s employment needs. But, times have changed.

Refugees’ initial employment typically pays minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour. The living wage for one adult living in Onondaga County is \$9.04.<sup>39</sup> The agricultural sector in

central New York regularly hires refugees, but because farms are outside of the public transportation routes, getting to work is a challenge. “If refugees aren’t creative with jobs,” said Mary Kane, a job developer at RAP, “they have no money.” Unlike many immigrants who may have been able to plan for resettling in the United States, refugees come with nothing. They have no safety net—no savings, no friends, no family. “They’ve hit bottom,” she said. “They’re here with their feet on the ground, and they need to move.”

And this fuels their motivation to work. In Kane’s experience, employers are very satisfied with refugee workers because they exemplify such basic skills as showing up on time and completing the tasks that are required. Stickley Audi & Co., Marquart Switches, Inc., and United Radio, consistently draw from the refugee population to hire workers.

James Branche, a recruiting specialist with United Radio, said he seeks refugees for positions in many departments, including shipping and receiving, quality control, customer service and accounting. Employing refugees has benefitted the company, he said, and some have become model employees, with a work ethic that ripples throughout the company. To help refugees overcome any language barriers that may be specific to United Radio’s line of work, the company offers English and other classes.

There aren’t enough of these employers, though, to meet the need, and many refugees who do find work are being hired on a temporary basis. “Our office is swamped,” Kane said.

Thanks to a grant from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, Catholic Charities is helping refugees enter the culinary field with a five-week daily training course that teaches food service skills. One of the areas it focuses on is pizza. “They are learning to make pizza, because there are so many pizza shops in Syracuse,” Castricone said. “But they are also learning other food service skills and to make other types of food.” Once the course is complete, Catholic Charities tries to place the graduates in jobs.

Some refugees who have earned college degrees now carry the burden of student debt they may not be able to afford to pay back. This situation has caused Paul Ariik, a former refugee from Sudan who’s been in Syracuse since 2001, to consider going back to Africa, where his college

degree would be worth a lot more. He doesn't want to return to Africa—his family members are all U.S. citizens—but he does consider it.

Innovative economic developers see tremendous potential in Syracuse's refugee population, and Northside UP is one of them. Its Green Train program prepares the unemployed and underemployed for jobs in the construction and weatherization industry. Zerodraft now has an entire team composed of Green Train graduates. Northside UP's newly formed Health Train initiative partners with St. Joseph's Hospital to identify and train low-income residents—who desire health-care careers but have difficulty accessing them—for jobs at St. Joseph's. The collaboration benefits the hospital, which is in need of entry-level workers, and local residents, in need of employment.

Entry-level jobs, though, may not be enough for long-term stability for refugees, and this is why programs such as Health Train offer workers more. In collaboration with Visions for Change, a local nonprofit that helps men and women out of poverty, Health Train workers are coached in financial literacy and other areas that should provide them with a better foothold for economic stability.

## *Economic Opportunities & Jobs*

### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

There are currently imaginative approaches which offer some shining examples of how to support and strengthen refugees' employment opportunities, from the Green Train and Health Train programs at Northside UP to individual companies offering ESL classes onsite. There are certain economic realities however—at this time, there just aren't enough entry-level jobs in Syracuse to employ refugees and help them achieve economic independence. Literacy programs that work specifically for refugees in the work environment exist and should be strengthened and networked; the unemployment rate for the Central New



York region in general is too high and efforts to bring more businesses to our community might be enhanced with the knowledge of this eager labor force.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Our community needs more skill specific, short-term training programs like Green Train and Health Train to help refugees move into jobs with career ladder potential.
- Entrepreneurial programs are a great opportunity to build refugees' economic sustainability, as are projects that provide mentorship in U.S. business practices. We should assess the current environment and help break down barriers to successful entrepreneurship.
- Businesses that employ refugees and offer them opportunities for personal growth should be recognized as a way of encouraging other businesses to consider hiring refugees.
- The City of Syracuse should pursue the World Market Square concept, developed for the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayors Challenge, to solidify and accelerate the Northside's development as an "international village" that spurs business and property development and enhances its reputation and draw among Central New York residents and visitors.

### REFUGEE-OWNED BUSINESSES

While there is no hard data on how many refugee-started businesses are in central New York, it doesn't take but a short walk down North Salina Street to witness our new neighbors' influences. "There's an incredible entrepreneurial impulse among refugees," said Dominic Robinson, director of Northside UP, an organization that helps counsel new, independent business owners. Unfortunately, though, the failure rate for new, small businesses is high. Even if their businesses fill a substantial niche in the community, many refugees don't have sufficient capital and lack a familiarity with Western business practices. Consequently, there is a lot of turnover, and refugee businesses operate at low margins.

"Refugees represent a variety of cultures and have a great deal to offer our neighborhoods, while also providing for their own communities", said Stasya Erickson, Program Coordinator at Northside Up. "Like the immigrants of 100 years ago, many refugees come into this country ready to work and capable of starting businesses. We need to figure out how to get these people access to capital and better educated about what it means to run a business in the United States and Syracuse, in particular". Raising capital is a

hurdle for any new business and getting access to capital is particularly difficult for refugees, said Eric Rogers from SCORE, which offers free business counseling and mentoring. Some organizations offer small loans, and SCORE tries to guide refugees to potential lenders. However, even if a refugee is successful in starting a business—say, a store—he or she may not have the marketing or business acumen to assess why a customer would shop at their store rather than someplace else.

Refugees who owned businesses in their homelands tend to be more successful at starting businesses here, Robinson said. But they still might not be aware of the "landscape" of doing business in the United States. There are capital costs and insurance needs. They need to know how to generate and maintain revenue, and how to comply with local and state codes. Lack of this knowledge is what makes their businesses fail. And, he said, while Northside Up and other organizations can help refugees develop business plans and educate them on what a profit and loss statement is, Syracuse needs to define this question: "How do you infuse a series of educational services to allow them to succeed?"



## Crime & Safety

Despite what may be “traditional” in a refugee’s country, culture and religion, refugees are required to follow U.S. law. Newcomers do receive orientations on public safety and their rights and responsibilities, but confusion, mistrust and a sense of severe vulnerability can remain. Many refugees have been abused by police in their homelands—even in their countries of first asylum, said Syracuse Police Det. Dzenan Selimovic, a former Bosnian refugee and police department liaison with the refugee community. “A lot of stuff refugees won’t report,” Selimovic said. “They’re afraid of police, of being victimized by police because it happened back home.”

In 2009, to help build trust, the Syracuse Police Department assigned two officers to patrol the Northside and focus on building relationships with the refugee community. Selimovic and Officer Varosh Zarian, a former refugee from Armenia, have focused on outreach and improving communication. They emphasize to refugees that it is safe to report crimes and to contact the police, should they need help. Refugees need to be educated about the United States and its laws before they come here, as well as when they arrive, according to Selimovic. “They need to understand the system here is not like their home country. While we are becoming more attuned to different cultures,” he said, “we can’t expect each police officer to be sensitive to each refugee’s cultural experience.”

Selimovic said the 911-call volume from refugees has increased in Syracuse over the years, and this may be due to refugees feeling “more comfortable calling police”—a good sign.

Selimovic and Zarian have distributed thousands of cards to refugees that can serve as informal IDs, listing their names, addresses, spoken languages and individuals who can translate for them. When interpreters are needed, the department has a list of volunteer interpreters to use. There are also individuals within the department who speak other languages, including Arabic, German, American Sign Language and Ukrainian. The ability to communicate builds trust and improves overall police efforts to keep the community safe, Selimovic said.

And while law enforcement databases do not track refugee-related crime statistics—there’s no box to check to

indicate the victim or perpetrator of a crime is a refugee—Selimovic said there are crimes committed against refugees, and refugees do commit crimes. “We have to see them as everyone else,” he said.

Criminal involvement (in which refugees are victims and perpetrators of crimes) in the refugee community ranges from serious crimes to minor violations. Most crimes in the refugee community are related to alcohol or domestic violence. Much of this, however, goes unreported, he said; some things classified as crimes here may not be illegal in their home country. And this is an area where a fear of police or authority can play a role in deterring reports.

In regards to rumors of youth and gang activity, Selimovic reported that there are no refugee “gangs” in Syracuse. A group of Burmese refugees who thought it was “cool” to live the gangster life no longer exists, he said. These Syracuse Burmese would join the Utica Burmese and drive around the Northside of Syracuse and beat up members of the African-American Highland Gang. In retaliation, boys from the Highland gang would pick on anyone who looked Asian, rob them or break into their homes. The detective said some refugees try to adopt the gangster lifestyle (with clothing, music and posing with guns for photographs), because they think it’s “funny” or a “game.” They don’t understand how serious it is. To stop the trouble, the department talked to the parents of the refugees and tried to make the kids understand they were playing a deadly and illegal “game.” This activity has since stopped.

If charged with a crime, a refugee is prosecuted through the same court system as U.S. residents and citizens. If found guilty, refugees can be deported, but usually they are not. “To remove a refugee, it’s very difficult,” Selimovic said. Instead, there are holding centers, such as the Buffalo Federal Detention Center in Batavia. If an individual “commits a deportable offense”—according to James “Pat” Tracy, a lawyer with Hiscock Legal Aid Society who works on immigration-related issues—he or she must serve the sentence first, and then, the individual would undergo immigration court proceedings. These can be appealed, and there is a parole-like period, during which he or she can be released under supervision.

## Legal Assistance

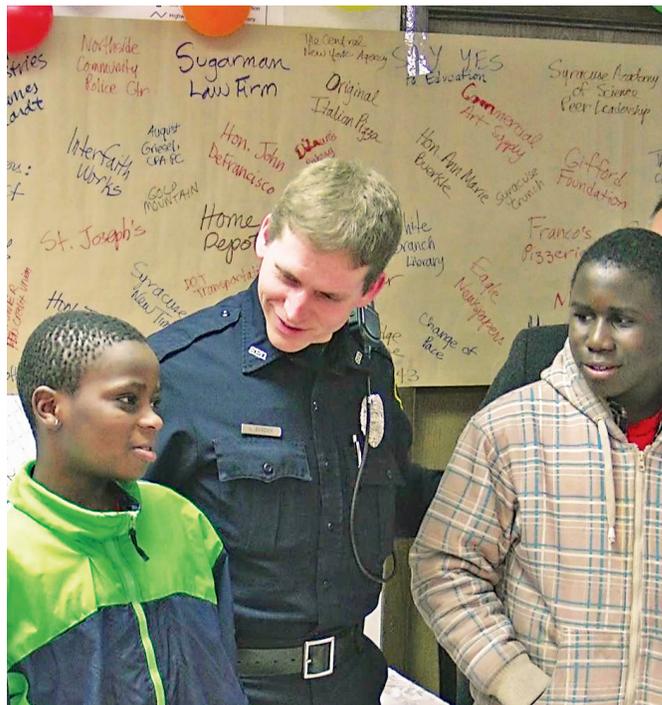
Two local groups are trying to help meet refugees' legal assistance needs by offering free services in regards to immigration law, which can include: travel documents, naturalization, petitions for asylum or temporary protected status, and work permits.

The Onondaga County Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyers Project has begun offering a one-day immigration law clinic available to any non-U.S. citizens, including refugees. "The need is so great," said Sally Curran, legal director of the Volunteer Lawyers Project. The first clinic was held for four hours at the beginning of February 2013 at Catholic Charities' resettlement services offices on North Salina Street. Seven volunteer attorneys served 22 clients. Clients signed up for one-hour consultations ahead of time, and because there were a few who didn't show up for their appointments, several "walk-in" clients were able to be seen. Each of the volunteer attorneys specialize in immigration law, and Curran said the services would have cost clients \$200 to \$300. The clinic was the brainchild of private practice attorneys who contacted Curran saying they regularly receive calls about immigration matters, but are unable to help clients who cannot afford their services; they then suggested the project find a way to help meet this need. Curran is working on lining up attorneys to serve at the next clinic and hopes to be able to offer the clinic at least twice a year.

The only pro-bono lawyer in Onondaga County who specializes in immigration law is James "Pat" Tracy, a lawyer with Hiscock Legal Aid Society. His work is funded through the Upstate New York Immigration Law project—a collaboration between Rochester and Northeastern NY Legal Aid Societies, which offers representation to clients in a 17-county region. When a potential client comes to Tracy for help, he conducts an intake interview that reviews the concern and the client's options. Then, he sends duplicates of this information to the Rochester Legal Aid, so its lawyer can review it, too. In 2011, Tracy helped 30 refugees with legal issues. Many of them were referred to him directly by InterFaith Works, Catholic Charities and RAP. There is no

### BUTTERNUT COMMUNITY POLICE CENTER

The Butternut Community Police Center opened in December 2009 to provide a constant police presence in the community, offer youth outreach programs and assist newly arrived refugees. Syracuse Police Officer Kenn Burdick said the Butternut Community Police Center offers "safe recreation" to youth and some tutoring help. It is housed in an 800-square-foot facility donated by Father's Heart Ministries at 907 Butternut St., and there are more children who need services than it can accommodate. The center, whose maintenance, upkeep and supplies are funded by donations, has been looking into a larger space on the Northside, which would allow it to offer multiple classes, a stage for performances, an outdoor play area and windows onto the street. The Center gives the kids in the neighborhood an alternative to street life, Burdick said; it teaches them to get along with each other, and teaches life skills.



formal referral process. "They just started calling me to ask, 'What do you think of this problem?'" he said.

Because resources for free or low-cost services are limited and immigration law is complicated, Catholic Charities has taken the extra step of applying for and recently receiving authorization to become a Bureau of Immigration Appeals (BIA)-approved organization. This allows Felicia Castricone to act as a BIA-accredited representative for refugees resettled by Catholic Charities. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), only attorneys or BIA-accredited representatives are allowed to offer legal advice for what USCIS forms to submit, explain immigration options, and communicate with USCIS about a non-U.S. citizen's case.<sup>40</sup>

## Crime & Safety

### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The Syracuse Police Department should be commended for assigning two detectives to serve as liaisons with the refugee community, as well as providing support for community police centers in refugee neighborhoods. The efforts should be strengthened and continued, particularly when it comes to teaching the general police force about the different nationalities and cultural expectations. The Hiscock Legal Aid Society and the Onondaga Bar Association should also be commended for their volunteer work with refugees and immigrants and their often complex cases.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Syracuse Police and Syracuse Fire departments should have office space and regular office hours at the proposed Refugee Assistance Center in order to familiarize refugees with everyday laws, codes and civic practices as well as their civic rights and responsibilities, to help them adjust to American life.



## Health

Complex processes and procedures are in place to protect both individual refugees' health and the health of the community in which they are resettling. Before a refugee comes to the United States, he or she must undergo an overseas medical exam (OME). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the medical exam is used to determine whether the refugee has any "inadmissible health-related conditions" that have the potential to put a community at risk. This includes refugees with certain communicable diseases such as vaccine preventable disease, active tuberculosis, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), cholera, plague or pandemic flu. Medical waivers to come to the United States may be granted under certain conditions. All refugees who come to Syracuse have been successfully screened and approved to be here.<sup>41</sup>

Once refugees are in the United States, they face even more challenges with respect to health and health care delivery. While many Americans complain about the complexity of the U.S. health-care system, it can be even more cumbersome for patients who not only don't speak English, but who also have customs at odds with Western medical practices and who aren't familiar with our approach to health care. Refugees may also carry the extra burden of trauma (psychological and physical) that negatively impacts their health, and medical needs that went untreated in their

homelands, countries of asylum or refugee camps. Local medical providers, resettlement services, and advocacy organizations trying to improve health outcomes, have to tackle all of this when trying to care for refugees.

The "health connections" office at RAP schedules tuberculosis (TB) screenings, refugees' initial health assessment exams and first visits to a primary care provider. TB screenings are done by the Onondaga County Health Department. Three providers in Syracuse are approved to conduct the initial health screenings: University Health Care Center, Industrial Medicine Associates, and the recently added Syracuse Community Health Center.

According to Amela Begovic, who heads RAP's health connections office, it is ideal for refugees to have the initial health assessments before they go to their primary care visits, but in some cases, such as a child awaiting enrollment in school, a the primary care visit would be scheduled first, to avoid a lengthy delay in placing the child in school. The initial health assessments are not required, and may be skipped if needed, Begovic said.

Another way RAP tries to streamline the process is to cluster refugees' primary care appointments according to the interpreters available at medical providers. For example, if a Spanish-speaking interpreter is at St. Joseph's Hospital, then Cuban refugees will be sent there. In this way, multiple interpreters don't have to be at multiple locations. Interpretation services are costly, and they are required at the primary care visit.

RAP does keep medical files for refugees, which can become important for them when they apply for permanent residency status (Green Cards) and need proof of immunizations. The medical files include the pre-arrival screening form, TB screening results, and their Refugee Health Assessments, which usually include records of immunizations. This information will be sent to medical providers as needed. However, medical providers have said they would like more information about their refugee patients' health

### CDC REFUGEE HEALTH PROFILES

To improve health care for refugees and immigrants in the United States, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is creating a series of health profiles for specific immigrant and refugee populations. Information has been collected with the help of the UNHCR, World Health Organization, U.S. Department of State and other sources. The first profile to be released is the Bhutanese Refugee Health Profile, and others are under development. Information, including the Bhutanese profile, can be found at: [www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/](http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/)

to be able to give them the care they need. Dr. Cynthia Morrow, Onondaga County's Commissioner of Health, has said that there is a "paucity of information" with respect to readily available medical data.

The 2009-2013 Community Health Assessment created a "Prevention Agenda" for the local community. In Onondaga County, local hospitals worked with the health department to identify three priority areas, one of which was refugee health. This was the impetus for creating a Refugee Health Task Force. This task force meets monthly and is open to any stakeholder in the community. An initial goal of the task force was to generate data but this has not yet happened. Consequently the group has not developed performance measures to assess progress/status in dealing with refugee health issues. Despite this, task force members report that there are plenty of immeasurable benefits from this task force, especially for improving communication between the resettlement and health service agencies.

### ***Mental Health: Overcoming Trauma***

"Mental health for refugees is the fundamental problem in our community," said Paul Ariik, a refugee from Sudan who came to Syracuse more than 10 years ago. Images of the past still haunt him: people being raped and cut up; dead bodies everywhere. Sometimes, he still has nightmares. He wishes there was a mental health immunization refugees could be given—one simple shot, and the problems would be gone.

Unfortunately, the problem is so deep and pervasive, that some providers think they are barely scratching the surface. Mental health underscores everything. It impacts a refugee's ability to learn English, get a job, care for children, succeed in school. Untreated mental illnesses can cause physical problems, even psychosis.

"These are people who have suffered greatly in many ways," said Jeanette Angeloro, the director of St. Joseph's



Behavioral Health outpatient clinics. Fifteen refugees, including one child, use the clinic's services; they are from Sudan, Nepal and Iraq. The predominant diagnosis is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): they are anxious, depressed and have trouble sleeping. Others suffer because they were people of status in their homelands and they now may have difficulty finding work, or be forced to take low-paying jobs.

Treatment focuses on talk therapy (individually and in groups) and medication. Language differences, however, pose "huge barriers," she said. The clinic uses a phone interpreter service, and sometimes the interpreter will hold back information or change information. There's also a pause between talking, which complicates it even more. Using parents or family members to translate is discouraged because of privacy issues, she said; the patient may not feel free to fully communicate his or her problems. Overall,

### **ADDRESSING TRAUMA**

In Amela Begovic's opinion, it's best to let refugees move on to their new lives in Syracuse and not focus on past trauma. Begovic is a health program facilitator at RAP and a former Bosnian refugee. When she first resettled in the United States, she was depressed. She had been a high school teacher back home, but when she came here, she worked in a factory. Eventually, she got a better job and went back to school. Now, with three children and her work at RAP, she doesn't have time to relive any nightmares of her previous life, and that's a good thing. It's tough to get over the trauma, she said. "[But], refugees should look to their future with a bright light." Helen Malina of the Center for New Americans agreed: "We give them permission not to relive it."

Dr. Peter Cronkright, an internist and professor of medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University, said that "how to screen and when to screen" for mental illness related to past trauma is complicated. At the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture in Toronto, the philosophy is to deal with the most important health issues now, and then move patients forward. "Give them a purpose in life," Dr. Cronkright said. This is where communities can play a strong role.

In some cases, provision of effective care can become restrained by what medical services are "billable." For example, in an analysis of refugee youths' mental health needs, OnCare—a federally funded advocacy organization for Onondaga County youth aged 5–21—reported: "Services are individualized to clients and not to culture. This model doesn't necessarily work in many cultures where the whole family has a role in decision-making. There are no true billable services that aren't grant funded. Case managers can't really help the whole family; they can only help the individual with identified problems."<sup>42</sup> To combat this, OnCare is pursuing legislative reform.

OnCare is a federally funded grant and is able to invest in pilot projects to test the effectiveness of different engagement strategies and interventions. OnCare is currently funding a mental health program at Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program- the Refugee Youth Project. It includes mental health screenings, family case management and youth support groups for newly arrived refugee youth.

patients (and practitioners) don't feel comfortable with interpreters, and this compromises the relationship between therapist and client.

Helen Malina from the Center for New Americans said one of the goals of a recent grant project is to train a corps of mental health workers for the refugee population. It is intended that members of the ethnic communities would take the lead in going into the community and reaching out to those in need, especially women and others who may be isolated.

### ***Cultural Brokers***

As part of its efforts to improve mental health outcomes for refugee youth, OnCare's Cultural and Linguistic Competence workgroup is developing a "cultural broker" model to assist refugee families. According to Tashia Thomas, OnCare's Director of Cultural and Linguistic Competence, cultural brokers could act as facilitators and mediators for families as they navigate the mental health system, translating not only languages, but also cultural differences. They will help link families of children having serious emotional disturbances—who belong to underserved cultural groups (e.g. refugees and immigrants with limited English proficiency)—to culturally appropriate supports and services through OnCare, ACCESS, informal support networks and other child serving systems. The need for such brokers was identified during conversations with representatives from refugee communities. OnCare's discussions with social services agencies, school personnel and mental health providers echoed this need. Some of the expected outcomes of this model are a reduction in the time between identification of mental health needs and accessing mental health services and a reduction of stigma in those communities. Thomas said OnCare aims to have the cultural broker position "up and running" by summer 2013. OnCare is exploring funding for the startup costs of this model and the goal is that it can be made sustainable through other available funding sources.

### ***Health***

#### **STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS**

The active Refugee Health Task Force is a welcome and valuable entity and its efforts should be reinforced, but it seems not all of the individuals and groups involved with refugee adult health are at the table. The work of the Refugee Health Task Force would also benefit from more complete, timely and accurate data on the numbers of refugees and their health status and health care needs. Ideally, refugees receive the initial health screening within the first 30 days of their arrival to the U.S. but some people may bypass screening and go straight to a primary care appointment when there is a bottleneck at the screening agencies. This provides an additional challenge to the creation of a system to analyze health screening data and improve care.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The committee supports continuation of the refugee-focused health task force with greater focus on collecting and assessing refugee data.



- The committee also supports continuance of OnCare's Mental Health Needs of Refugee Children Learning Community and Cultural and Linguistic Competence Workgroup and implementation of their recommendations and evaluation of outcomes.
- Both better data and better data systems are needed so that the community can provide the best possible care with available resources. The resettlement agencies and RAP should work with the Refugee Health Task force to develop a plan to create better systems to capture and share data.
- A single, centralized refugee health clinic has the potential to allow for better coordination of medical care and to address the challenges of decentralized data systems.
- Refugees' mental health needs are critical to their resettlement success, and to best provide care requires greater study by local health services providers. Also, refugee communities need to survey their members to assess the need and determine how they can best reach out to men, women and children in need of mental health care and social support.
- Training for members of the ethnic communities and other volunteers as a mental health corps should be evaluated and if found appropriate expanded to help those suffering from the effects of trauma and deprivation through provision of informal support services such as support groups.
- Although the issue was not explored in a study session, the Study Committee heard anecdotally that some female refugees express a need for information on family planning, a culturally-charged practice for some groups. The issue has come to the attention of the Refugee Health Task Force, which will try to assess and address this concern. In the meantime, the Study Committee recommends that agencies and their volunteers be provided with Health Department referral information to provide to women.

## Social Support: Welcoming New Friends

*“Some of the ‘Sew What?’ American volunteers have become close to the refugees, visiting their homes to help them with projects and chat about their families and their accomplishments. Of course, the ladies are always proud to tell us of their children’s successes in their American schools. Just today, I was at a student’s home to help with her sewing machine. She usually wants to feed me—she makes a delicious dish of rice topped with green peppers sautéed in a wonderful sauce—but there wasn’t time today, so, she sent me home with a pomegranate and a mango; it’s all but impossible to say no.”*

—Jennifer Crittenden, president of Women Transcending Boundaries

Time and again, the OCL study committee heard that communication, outreach, and support were imperative to refugees’ progress, whether they help in improving their English, education, economic opportunities, housing, public safety, or health. Social support may seem an ancillary benefit of learning a new skill, but make no mistake, the bonds developed in such settings strengthen refugees’ sense of well-being, and available support can be the leverage refugees need to establish solid lives here in Syracuse. You only have to listen closely to their stories to discern this.

For seven years, volunteer Nancy Shepard has been coordinating the medical care for Ramazani\*, a Somali man who is partially paralyzed and cannot speak as a result of two strokes. In 2004, he and his 11-year-old son, Ali\*, arrived in Syracuse as refugees. “Nancy has been like a mother to my family,” says Ali, who graduated from Nottingham High School and is now a freshman at Onondaga Community College. “She comes to our apartment twice a week. She handles my father’s medical records, such as filling his pillbox, going to the pharmacy collecting his prescriptions, and also his doctor’s appointments.”

Without this assistance, Ramazani would not have been able to live independently in a handicapped-accessible apartment with his son, and Shepard points to this preservation of the father–son relationship for why Ali is doing so well.

“Ramazani’s presence and example at home required and allowed his son to grow into a responsible, self-motivated young man who has just completed his first semester at Onondaga Community College with an ‘A’ average,” she said.

Shepard’s observation echoes research of Sudanese refugee families in Canada: “Studies on [refugee] populations indicate that during resettlement, informal sources of support such as friends and family reduce stress, improve

\*names changed

well-being, increase access to employment, education, and other basic needs, and foster a strong sense of belonging amongst members of similar ethnic background.”<sup>44</sup>

A 2012 study of Burmese and Burundian refugees in Michigan found that refugees’ primary source of support were the resettlement agencies, and when direct case management ended after 90 days, many refugees felt as if they were losing members of their family. A Burundian woman told researchers she couldn’t leave her house. “I don’t know what to do,” she said. “I don’t know [anyone.]”<sup>45</sup>

The challenge, then, comes in creating the opportunities to build social networks. Resettlement agencies and RAP offer programs that extend beyond the management of initial resettlement, but these organizations cannot carry the burden of community development on their own.

Ethnic Community-Based Organizations (ECBO’s), such as the Somali–Bantu and Bhutanese ECBO’s, offer their members a variety of programs that aim to empower their communities and help preserve their culture. English, citizenship and job training classes are common, as are after-school tutoring programs and soccer teams. Lack of funding, however, is a pervasive problem for ECBO’s, as is finding a permanent space to house their members and programs. “We cannot afford anything,” said Harmadi Mukoma, a representative of the Somali–Bantu community. It rents space on Pond Street, but must collect money from its members to pay rent. The Bhutanese ECBO lacks a formal space, and so it meets in the homes of its members.

Other groups within Syracuse have stepped in to help meet the need. Here are just a few examples of other organizations and their programs that help foster and expand refugees’ social networks:

**Americanization League** – A nonprofit public service agency supported by Onondaga County and the SCSD, the Americanization League helps refugees and immigrants in dealing with governmental agencies in matters pertaining to

“Most desirable for immigrants and refugees may be social support that functions as a ‘springboard,’ not just a ‘safety net,’ working directly in terms of social relations and indirectly by facilitating access to employment, education and other basic needs.”<sup>43</sup>

—Simich L, [Beiser M, Stewart M, Mwakarimba E](#). “Providing social support for immigrants and refugees in Canada: Challenges and Directions” [J Immigr Health](#). 2005 Oct;7(4):259-68.

immigration policy, and also provides support and referrals to various community programs and services to people needing help in adjusting to American life.

**Hopeprint** – “At Hopeprint, we believe that building genuine and mutual friendships is the key to everything. Each of our programs seeks to create a venue where relationships can be built” said Hopeprint executive director and founder, Nicole Watts. Programs aim to help refugees thrive by building relationships. Two Hopeprint homes on Syracuse’s Northside open their doors to refugees for conversation groups, English tutoring classes, Girl Scouts’ activities, boys’ mentorship programs, family and life coaching, as well as children and teenage youth groups. Men, women and children—refugee and non-refugee—are welcomed and encouraged to become involved.

**Salt City Harvest Farm** – Organized by Assumption Food Pantry and a generous donor, Salt City Harvest is being launched in 2013 as a community farm on donated acres in Kirkville. It will be open to residents of the Northside who will commit time to work at the farm and then receive a share of the harvest (one-third goes to food pantries, two-thirds to the families). By working a shared farm, rather than individual family plots, the farm is sure to help ‘grow’ community as well as fresh produce.

**White Branch Library** – Serving the city’s ethnically diverse Northside, the library houses an English Language Literacy Lab, immigration, ESOL and citizenship resources and an English conversation group. The Bhutanese community of Syracuse and volunteer Lisa Warnecke initiated a free, bilingual (English and Nepali) beginning yoga program at the library to help create community and share information on health and nutrition.

**Women Transcending Boundaries (WTB)** – WTB, an interfaith organization for women, offers a “Sew What?” program in cooperation with the Center for New Americans. The program’s purpose is to teach refugee women to sew using American sewing machines, notions, and techniques, while practicing their English and becoming more comfortable with American women and culture. The American volunteers and refugee students have developed friendships that frequently extend beyond the program to on-going support. Women who have progressed enough to work on their own are given a donated sewing machine, a bag of essential notions, a lesson in their home on that particular machine, and a phone number with instructions to call if they have problems in the future. They are also invited to drop in on future classes to ask questions and get advice. In addition, WTB has organized refugees with sewing and knitting skills to market their wares. They have sold more than \$1,500 of products at the 2012 Plowshares craft fair and additional items are sold at local stores. Past students have been from Bhutan, Nepal, Burma, Congo, Iraq, Vietnam, and Turkmenistan; and the waiting list includes women from Cuba and Ethiopia.

**Yeshua Restoration Ministries** – Commonly known as the “home of Lou and Anne,” the North Townsend Street

## YOUTH OUTREACH

For refugee youth, play and social time are essential not just to resettlement but also healthy development. Participating in the extracurricular activities offered by the Syracuse City School District has shown to improve refugees’ transition to school and their communities. Refugee youth also seek out activities at the Butternut Community Police Center, which is housed in an 800-square-foot facility rented from Father’s Heart Ministries on Butternut Street. The center offers afterschool programs and summer activities. Catholic Charities runs the Refugee Youth Outreach Program at its Northside CYO on North Salina Street. This afterschool program hosts as many as 30 to 50 refugee children on a daily basis, and the CYO has its own youth case-worker. Activities are recreational, and may include field trips and partnerships with Syracuse University student volunteers.

organization offers a soccer club to boys aged 10 to 15 years old. The boys, who come from at least seven different countries, must give back to the community if they want to play; common projects include neighborhood cleanups.

## Social Support

### STUDY COMMITTEE FINDINGS

A number of organizations and individuals have stepped up to assist with refugees beyond the early days of their arrival, most conducting their activities with little resources except time and commitment. Their activities are to be commended and celebrated. The study process not only brought several to light, but also smoothed the way for the building of partnerships between the grassroots efforts and the established agencies.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The presence and potential of Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBOs) should be maximized. Creating community projects, shared learning activities, and opportunities for established former refugees to assist new refugees can produce excellent pathways for social support and community building.
- A central, refugee-focused services center would facilitate community-building and anchor services and programming, helping refugees to take root and succeed in our community.
- The capacity of the ECBO’s should be strengthened by continuing existing leadership training opportunities, and assisting groups to secure and share resources, office space and meeting rooms so that they may better serve their communities’ needs.
- Some nationality groups are served by more than one ECBO’s— for example, there is more than one established Somali community association. These are in place for reasons best understood by their membership and we acknowledge that there are specific reasons they operate separately. However, all the different ECBOs should be encouraged to work together toward their common goals.
- The ECBO leaders, along with other refugee leaders, should be “at the table” whenever decisions regarding their future are discussed.

## Conclusion

A key premise of the original study concept was to dispel the “myths” in our community—misconceptions about refugee resettlement and about refugees themselves. We believe we took a big step forward within a fairly large and critical mass of key stakeholders by creating a baseline of numbers, roles, responsibilities, and processes pertaining to local refugee resettlement. This baseline understanding can serve as a platform for the next phase of collaboration and communication beyond this initial group—to others in our community who perhaps are not as engaged with or aware of the refugees and service providers in our region.

It was enlightening to learn about the resources available to New Americans, and to realize the degree to which the refugee resettlement agencies work together, evident through the stories shared by the agencies, and those passionate about supporting and embracing the refugee community. At the same time, it seemed at the outset that the path of refugee resettlement appeared unclear and disorganized—even those “in the know” were sometimes confused by the complex process. Very often people and organizations become so caught up in their work they forget that others do not have the same information.

As the study dialogues evolved, it became clear one of the most impactful results would be a community prioritization of continued communication. The study sessions demonstrated the need for a forum for those in our community working to assist and support refugees, as well as the refugees themselves, to share their stories. The ensuing conversations at each study meeting opened up new avenues for collaboration, and a new shared understanding of collective challenges as well as solutions. That alone made it worthwhile—but it was in the gathering of this information that we began to move from fact collection to idea creation.

The recommendations presented here are made with the clear understanding that to see additional progress, we need champions to embrace, adopt and deliver them. We attempted to make our determinations through a filter of practicality, mindful of the resources we have within our community, as well as by looking at some of the resources we could seek from outside this region. Some recommendations are bolder and thus require additional planning. Others are relatively easy, the low-hanging fruit. We are well aware that additional resources, both financial and in human capital, are required to see almost all of these come to fruition, though continued collaboration could bring about great results—Central New York has the pieces in place and indeed, is considered a “best practice” refugee resettlement community in many regards.

Our community has a long history of welcoming people from around the world. We have indeed seen an increase in New Americans in the last four to five years, as global unrest has grown. The higher numbers, coinciding as they did with an economic downturn that hurt all residents of our community, have made the refugee presence more noticeable and for some, more problematic. Underlying the study was an unspoken question—do we have the resources and the willingness to welcome this population in a way that helps them without negatively affecting others in our community? The actions we recommend might be targeted towards helping this new population, but are built on the premise that by helping them, we help ourselves.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that many of the issues we discuss are the same confronted by our city as a whole. Affordable, quality housing is in short supply, jobs are not plentiful, literacy levels need to be improved, health care delivery systems are challenged. There are many pathways to improvement for our community—and if the stories we heard over the past year are any indication, one of these pathways is to work together to welcome a population that offers our community an incredible resource and great potential to aid in our region’s vitality and renewal.

*Heidi Holtz and Kristen Mucitelli-Heath, co-chairs*

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## Appendix: Refugee Resettlement in Syracuse 2001-2011

*From U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration*

Calendar Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Afghanistan	3	14	8	7	6	5	1	5	3	0	7	59
Azerbaijan	0	0	20	11	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	37
Belarus	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Bhutan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	199	373	231	342	1,145
Bosnia and Herzegovina	230	175	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	412
Burma	0	2	1	27	12	50	246	416	415	244	253	1,666
Burundi	0	0	0	0	0	13	114	37	0	23	0	187
Cambodia	0	0	0	0	0	6	8	0	0	0	0	14
Central African Republic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	14
China	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	1	4	10
Congo	0	0	0	0	7	0	5	0	0	0	0	12
Cuba	3	2	0	11	11	11	3	7	8	16	2	74
Dem. Rep. Congo	11	2	0	14	0	11	8	37	38	71	3	195
Eritrea	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	43	24	92
Ethiopia	0	1	0	12	3	1	10	2	5	6	5	45
Iran	0	0	10	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	5	19
Iraq	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	56	121	104	39	322
Ivory Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Kazakhstan	9	5	3	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	22
Korea, North	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	6
Kuwait	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	10
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Liberia	0	0	14	71	75	34	9	17	4	7	2	233
Mauritania	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	0	0	14
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Palestine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
Russia	0	2	0	0	72	64	0	0	0	0	0	138
Rwanda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	7	0	3	16
Senegal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Serbia	4	19	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Sierra Leone	4	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	9
Somalia	5	1	49	241	64	92	65	54	187	115	99	972
Sudan	87	23	66	106	49	45	3	19	1	8	20	427
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Togo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Uganda	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Ukraine	5	32	9	11	11	4	4	13	7	4	4	104
Uzbekistan	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vietnam	14	7	12	0	13	17	16	0	5	3	0	87
<b>Total for Syracuse</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>1,223</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>6,405</b>

## Appendix: Glossary of Terms

Terms referring to refugees and refugee resettlement are often incorrectly used. This is an official list of terms as defined by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. For the complete list of terms, visit the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Glossary

**Alien**—Any person not a citizen or national of the United States.

**Asylee**—An alien in the United States or at a port of entry who is found to be unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution or the fear thereof must be based on the alien's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. For persons with no nationality, the country of nationality is considered to be the country in which the alien last habitually resided. Asylees are eligible to adjust to lawful permanent resident status after one year of continuous presence in the United States. These immigrants are limited to 10,000 adjustments per fiscal year.

**Country of Birth**—The country in which a person is born.

**Country of Citizenship**—The country in which a person is born (and has not renounced or lost citizenship) or naturalized and to which that person owes allegiance and by which he or she is entitled to be protected. Former Allegiance: The previous country of citizenship of a naturalized U.S. citizen or of a person who derived U.S. citizenship.

**Country of (Last) Residence**—The country in which an alien habitually resided prior to entering the United States.

**Geographic Area of Chargeability**—Any one of five regions—Africa, East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East and South Asia, and the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—into which the world is divided for the initial admission of refugees to the United States. Annual consultations between the Executive Branch and the Congress determine the ceiling on the number of refugees who can be admitted to the United States from each area. Beginning in fiscal year 1987, an unallocated reserve was incorporated into the admission ceilings.

**Immigrant** (also known as Permanent Resident Alien)—An alien admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident. Permanent residents are also commonly referred to as immigrants; however, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) broadly defines an immigrant as any alien in the United States, except one legally admitted under specific nonimmigrant categories (INA section 101(a)(15)). An illegal alien who entered the United States without inspection, for example, would be strictly defined as an immigrant under the INA but is not a permanent resident alien. Lawful permanent residents are legally

accorded the privilege of residing permanently in the United States. They may be issued immigrant visas by the Department of State overseas or adjusted to permanent resident status by the Department of Homeland Security in the United States.

**Migrant**—A person who leaves his/her country of origin to seek residence in another country.

**Nationality**—The country of a person's citizenship or country in which the person is deemed a national.

**Country of Naturalization**—The conferring, by any means, of citizenship upon a person after birth.

**Refugee**—A formal term of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) referring to any person who is outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution or the fear thereof must be based on the alien's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and verified by the UNHCR. People with no nationality must generally be outside their country of last habitual residence to qualify as a refugee. Refugees are subject to ceilings by geographic area set annually by the President in consultation with Congress and are eligible to adjust to lawful permanent resident status after one year of continuous presence in the United States.

**Refugee Approvals**—The number of refugees approved for admission to the United States during a fiscal year. The US State Department works with the UNHCR to determine the number of refugees that will be accepted annually to the United States, generally around 70,000 per year to the US. Internationally, the number can be much higher, as refugees are also approved by other countries. The US Department of Homeland Security officers in overseas offices assure that refugees are not security risks to the US.

**Refugee Arrivals**—The number of refugees the Department of Homeland Security initially admits to the United States through ports of entry during a fiscal year.

**Refugee Authorized Admissions**—The maximum number of refugees allowed to enter the United States in a given fiscal year. As set forth in the Refugee Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-212) the President determines the annual figure after consultations with Congress.

**Resettlement**—Permanent relocation of refugees in a place outside their country of origin to allow them to establish residence and become productive members of society there. Refugee resettlement is accomplished with the direct assistance of private voluntary agencies working with the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement.

## Appendix: List of Acronyms

- BIA** – Bureau of Immigration Appeals
- CYO** – Catholic Youth Organization
- DHS** – Department of Homeland Security
- ECBO's** – Ethnic Based Community Organizations
- ELL(s)** – English Language Learner(s)
- EOC** – Educational Opportunity Center
- ESL** – English as a Second Language
- GED** – General Educational Development diploma
- IFW** – InterFaith Works
- INA** – Immigration and Nationality Act
- IOM** – Organization for Migration
- LAB-R** – Language Assessment Battery-Revised
- Northside UP** – Northside Urban Partnership
- NYSESLAT** – New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test
- PTSD** – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- RAP** – Refugee Assistance Program
- SARS** – severe acute respiratory syndrome
- SYTE** – Say Yes to Education
- SUNY** – State University of New York
- TB** – tuberculosis
- UNHCR** – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- USCIS** – US Citizenship and Immigration Services
- WTB** – Women Transcending Boundaries

## Appendix: Service Providers

This is a partial list of organizations in Syracuse and Onondaga County that work with refugee populations as of April 2013. Please note it is not meant to represent a full directory of services.

**Americanization League** (573 E. Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.435.4120) — Based out of the SCSD, and funded in part by Onondaga County, this organization helps immigrants become naturalized citizens. Works with refugees as they move to immigrant status, acquire green cards, etc.

**Butternut Community Police Center** (500 Butternut Street, Syracuse, NY 13208 – 315.422.2745) — facility offers after-school programs, holiday events, summer camp.

**Cathedral Academy at Pompei** (932 North McBride Street, Syracuse, NY 13208 – 315.422.8548) — offers one evening a week adult ESL classes; mostly parents of Cathedral students, intermediate and advanced level.

**Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Services** (Refugee Resettlement Agency) (527 North Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13208 – 315.474.7428) — Resettlement services and support. The program provides assistance with applying for jobs and registering for English language classes, locating translators, finding housing, and securing medical care. Special academic programs prepare refugee children to attend school. The Refugee Youth Outreach Program provides recreation, tutoring, homework assistance, and other supports to refugee children.

**City of Syracuse Neighborhood and Business Development** (201 East Washington Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.448.8100) — concerned with both housing and economic opportunities for refugees.

**Centro Bus Company** (1 Centro Center, Syracuse, NY 13201 – 315.442.3400)

**CNY Works** (443 North Franklin Street, Syracuse, NY 13204 – 315.473.8250) — provides services for job seekers and businesses.

### ETHNIC COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

#### **Bhutanese Community in Syracuse**

ECBO President: Hari Adhikari

Additional Contact: Jai Subedi

The ECBO provides:

- ESL classes
- Citizenship classes
- Nepali language class for kids & Youth engagement
- Cultural dance/music participation and celebration of cultural festivals
- Participating in all events/festivals in neighborhood (i.e. World Refugee Day)

#### **Original Somali Bantu Wazigua Community Organization of Central New York**

ECBO President: Osman Mohamed

Additional Contact: Osman Ramadham]

Activities/Programs (held at center located at 414 Pond Street, Mon-Fri)

- After school youth program
- Adult ESL & citizenship classes
- Employment Assistance for Jobs Plus clients and their members

#### **Liberia: Licos**

ECBO President: Michael Toe

ECBO Activities/Programs:

- Celebration of country's independence (July 26)

#### **Karen Community (Burmese)**

ECBO Leader: Ko Ko Lwin

ECBO Activities/Programs:

- ESL Classes coordinated by and held at Myanmar Baptist Church

#### **South Sudanese Community of CNY, Inc.**

ECBO Leader: Santino Atak

Activities/Programs:

- Social events including youth program at St. Vincent

**Hiscock Legal Aid** (351 S Warren Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315. 422.8191) — program for immigrant assistance also often receives request for assistance with refugees, especially towards green card status. Also works with Vera House on domestic violence issues.

**Hopeprint** (Lilac Street, Syracuse, NY 13208 – ourhopeprint@gmail.com) — facilitates sustainable development of local resettled refugees and their communities in the areas of economy, health, leadership, education and justice. Programs: Hopeprint Home, life coaching; ESL classes, tutoring, conversation groups, children's programming and more.

**InterFaith Works Center for New Americans** (Refugee Resettlement Agency) (mailing address: 3049 E. Genesee Street, Syracuse, New York, 13224 - 315-474-1261) — assist refugees with a variety of needs such as: arranging for housing, furnishings, and food; enrolling adults in English classes and children in school; ensuring that necessary medical care is received; finding employment and providing help in understanding U.S. workplace culture. Also provide public education about refugees and immigration to encourage welcoming community.

**JOBSplus!** (677 South Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.442.3242) — focus on helping people in the welfare system find and keep employment beginning when individuals apply for public assistance and continuing until all who are able have achieved economic independence.

**Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County** (PO Box 2129, Syracuse, NY 13220 – 315.428.8129) — builds and supports community initiatives that improve literacy levels across the lifespan. [www.CNYLearns.org](http://www.CNYLearns.org) is their directory of adult education and literacy services.

**Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse** (2111 South Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13205 – 315.471.1300) — works with ESL students through tutoring and small group classes; partners with other literacy programs in city to provide training.

**The North Side Learning Center** (808 North McBride Street, Syracuse, NY 13203 – 315.378.4825) — since 2009 has offered volunteer-led ESL classes for youth, and adults and their children at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

**Northside Urban Partnership** (800 North Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13208 – (315.299.8228) — an urban revitalization collaborative (Catholic Charities, St. Joseph’s Hospital, CenterState CEO and Franciscan Collaborative Ministries) dedicated to engaging diverse groups of people and organizations in revitalizing the Northside of Syracuse. Programs: Neighborhood Workforce Development, Urban Gardens and Green Space, Public Art, Housing and Commercial Development, Cultural Gatherings, Community Organizing.

**Onondaga Historical Association** (321 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.428.1864) — works with JOBSplus! to orient refugees to community and community history.

**Onondaga County Health Department** (421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.435.3252) — provides programs and services to assist refugees with health issues such as guides to healthy living, finding health care, and disease prevention help.

**Onondaga County Department of Social Services** (421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.435.2985) — provides temporary public assistance: Medicaid, food stamps etc.

**Onondaga County Public Library** (447 South Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.435.1900) — Adult Literacy Program offers a variety of materials and services to assist adult learners in becoming “information literate,” and to help them on a path to lifelong learning.

**OCPL’s White Branch Library** — serving Syracuse’s Northside (763 Butternut St., Syracuse, New York 13208 – 315.435.3519)

- Beginner ESL Classes
- ESL Conversation Group
- Literacy Assessments for 1-on-1 tutoring (Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse)
- ESL Literacy Computer Lab

**Partners in Learning/MANOS/West Side Learning Center** (422 Gifford Street, Syracuse, NY 13204 – 315.744.3831) — engages diverse ethno-linguistic adults, children and families in education, training, and employment services in partnership with community resources.

**P.E.A.C.E. Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start** (217 South Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.470.3300) — provides pregnant women and young children (age 0-5) prenatal education and support services, and home and center-based early childhood development programming.

**ProLiteracy** (104 Marcellus Street, Syracuse, NY 13204 – 315.422.9121) — developing a national curriculum for literacy service providers addressing the issue of cultural responsiveness and integration to American culture. Focuses on adult education.

**Refugee Assistance Program, Syracuse City School District** (501 Park Street, Syracuse, NY 13203 – 315.435.5801) — RAP provides refugees with access to different facilities or directly provides many services that will enable them to become self-sufficient. Programs: ESOL classes to adults, job development services, help with getting connected to the Health Care System, cultural orientation, community education and advocacy. Support refugees up to five years from arrival.

**St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center** (301 Prospect Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13201 – 315.448.5111) — is the seventh largest employer in the Central New York region, and located within the Prospect Hill neighborhood on Syracuse’s Northside, a community that has long been the home to immigrants and refugees.

**SCORE** (224 Harrison Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.471.9393) — comprised of more than 50 experienced business men and women who volunteer their time supporting entrepreneurship throughout Central NY.

**Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center** (Syracuse EOC - 100 New Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.472-0130) — delivers comprehensive, community-based academic and workforce development programs and provides support services that lead to enhanced employment opportunities, access to further education, and personal growth and development.

**Syracuse City School District** (725 Harrison Street, Syracuse, NY 13210 – 315.435.4927) — ESL for SCSD students as well as Adult Education classes.

**Syracuse Housing Authority** (516 Burt Street, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.475.6181) — SHA has many Housing Programs owns and manages 15 housing developments with over 2,500 apartments designed to help those in the Syracuse community.

**Syracuse Police Department** (511 S State Street, 2nd Floor, Syracuse, NY 13202 – 315.442.5200) — Two officers who are former refugees work with the refugee community, including workshops to discuss police relationships and how not to be a victim; they also help arrange interpreters and conduct in-service training in cultural competency for police officers.

**University Health Care Center** (SUNY Upstate) – (315.464.5540) — Adult Clinic and Pediatric Clinic – perform Refugee Health Assessments for newly arrived refugees as well as serving refugee patients’ health concerns.

## Appendix: OCL Studies

1979	Equality and Fairness in Property Assessment
1980	Young People in Trouble: Can Our Services be Organized and Delivered More Effectively?
1981	The County Legislature: Its Function, Size and Structure
1982	Declining School Enrollments: Opportunities for Cooperative Adaptations
1983	Onondaga County Public Works Infrastructure: Status, Funding and Responsibilities
1984	Police Services in Onondaga County: A Review and Recommendations
1985	The City and County Charters: Time for Revision?
1986-87	Blueprints for the Future: Recommendations for the Year 2000
1988	The Role of the Food Industry in the Economy of Onondaga County
1989	Poverty and its Social Costs: Are There Long-term Solutions?
1990	Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?
1991	Schools that Work: Models in Education that Can be Used in Onondaga County
1992	Town and Village Governments: Opportunities for Cost-effective Changes
1993	The Criminal Justice System in Onondaga County: How Well is it Working?
1994	The Delivery of Human Services: Opportunities for Improvement
1995	Reinvesting in the Community: Opportunities for Economic Development
1996	Building a Non-Violent Community: Successful Strategies for Youth
1997	Security Check: Public Perceptions of Safety and Security
1998	Onondaga County School Systems: Challenges, Goals, and Visions for the Future
1999	Economic Development: Models for Success
2000	Housing and Neighborhoods: Tools for Change
2001	Civic Leadership for Community Transformation
2002	State of the Arts
2003	Mental Health Services: Access, Availability and Responsiveness
2004	Disappearing Democracy? A Report on Political Participation in Onondaga County
2005	Strategic Government Consolidation
2006	Fixing the Hub: Leveraging Better Outcomes for Downtown
2007	How Inequality Makes Us Sick: The Growing Disparities in Health and Health Care
2008-09	Rethinking I-81
2009-10	What Does It Mean To Be Green?
2010-11	Community Image
2012-13	The World at Our Doorstep

## Appendix: OCL Membership 2011-2012

### OCL LIFETIME MEMBERS

Karen Hanford  
Patrick Mannion  
Adelaide Silvia  
Nan Strickland

### OCL CORPORATE SUSTAINING MEMBERS

Gifford Foundation  
Bousquet & Holstein  
CNY Community  
Foundation  
Duke Malavenda  
Progressive Expert  
Consulting

### OCL CORPORATE SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Eric Mower & Associates  
LeMoyne College  
St. Joseph's Hospital  
Health Center  
Washington Street  
Partners

### OCL CORPORATE BASIC MEMBERS

Agency Specialists  
Insurance Group  
ARC of Onondaga  
ARISE  
CenterState CEO  
Filtertech Inc.  
Greater Syracuse  
Association of Realtors  
InterFaith Works  
Messenger Associates, Inc.  
OCM BOCES  
Onondaga County Public  
Library  
Pioneer Companies  
Syracuse University  
Testone, Marshall &  
Disenza  
The Community  
Preservation Corp.  
United Radio Service  
Visual Technologies

### OCL CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

Laurie Black  
Charlotte & Alexander  
Holstein

### OCL SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Janet Agostini  
Sean Becker  
Barbara Carranti  
John Eberle  
Stan Goettel  
Eric & Kuki Haines  
Marilyn Higgins  
Andrea Latchem  
Sarah Merrick  
Judith Mower  
Pamela Percival  
Paul Predmore  
Wendy Riccelli  
Vito Sciscioli  
Siegfried Snyder  
Douglas Sutherland  
Volker Weiss  
Carol Wixson

### OCL BASIC MEMBERS

Arlene Abend  
Cheryl Abrams  
Kevin Agee  
Timothy Atseff and  
Margaret Ogden  
Harold Avery  
Liz Ayers  
Joseph Bartolo  
Jeffrey Bastable  
Carrie Berse  
Kay Benedict Sgarlata  
Kay Benedict Sgarlata  
Frank Bersani  
Hugh Bonner  
Minna Buck  
Elizabeth Burton  
Christine Capella-Peters  
Wendy Carl Isome  
Virginia Carmody  
Charles Chappell, Jr.  
Alexander and Margaret  
Charters  
Helen Clancy  
David Coburn  
Linda Cohen  
Mary Anne Corasaniti  
George Curry  
Ian Cuthill  
Lisa Daly  
Betty DeFazio  
Lance Denno

Donna DeSiato  
Robert Dewey  
Richard and Theresa  
Driscoll  
Helen Druce  
Carol Dwyer and Joseph  
Wilczynski  
Linda and Marion Ervin  
Caragh Fahy  
Virginia Felleman  
Daniel Franklin Ward  
Mary Beth Frey  
Arthur Fritz  
Edgar Galson  
Edmund Gendzielewski  
Edward Green  
Gary Grossman  
Linda Hall  
Daniel Hammer  
Marion Hancock Fish  
Linda Hartsock  
Eileen Hathaway Krell  
Linda Henley and Russ  
Andrews  
Judith Hight  
Elizabeth Hintz  
Brian Hoke  
David Holder  
Heidi Holtz  
Susan Horn  
Pamela Hunter  
Jeanne Jackson  
J. Edward Kaish  
Beata Karpinska-Prehn  
Daniel Kelley  
Karen Kitney  
Peter Knoblock  
Steven Kulick  
Ellen Lautz  
Minchin Lewis  
Stanley Linhorst  
Rebecca Livengood  
Benjamin Lockwood  
Donald MacLaughlin  
Janet and John Mallan  
Matthew Marko  
Patti Maxwell  
Nancy McCarty  
Lindsay McClung  
John McCrea  
Sarah McIlvain  
David Michel  
Doreen Milcarek

Charles Morgan  
John and Nancy Murray  
Walter Neuhauser  
Elizabeth Nolan  
Francis O'Connor  
Joseph O'Hara  
Donna O'Mahony Rohde  
Anthony Ortega  
David Paccone  
Stephanie Pasquale  
Harvey Pearl  
Lucille Perkins  
Eleanor Peterson  
Eric and Joanne Pettit  
Onetia Pierson  
Marilyn Pinsky  
Buffy Quinn  
David Reed  
Grant Reeher & Kathryn  
Sowards  
M. Catherine Richardson  
Maryann Roefaro  
Beth Rougeux  
Martha Ryan  
Dene Sarason  
Peter Sarver  
Marian Schoenheit  
Kara Shore  
Bernice Schultz  
Lynn and Guy Scott  
Stephen Skinner  
Charleen Smith  
Cynthia Stevenson  
Bethany Stewart  
Edmund Sullivan  
Miriam Swift  
Marsha Tait  
Merike Treier  
Gregg Tripoli  
Sara Wall-Bollinger  
Elaine Walter  
Andrea Wandersee  
Sara Wason  
Paul Welch  
Craig Wilson  
Kathleen Wojslaw

### OCL STUDENT MEMBERS

Daniel Cowen  
Sarah Walton

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