STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESETTLEMENT COMMUNITY IN MORRIS AND UNION COUNTIES: A STUDY OF THE REFLEXIVE IMPACT OF ENGAGEMENT

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Resettlement Community in Morris and Union Counties: A Study of the Reflexive Impact of Engagement

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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There is an ongoing refugee crisis that has captured the attention of countless Americans. Unfortunately, perceptions people have of refugees are not often based on first-hand accounts of people who actually spend time engaging the recently arrived refugees. These refugees now comprise the resettlement community that is found throughout the towns, counties, cities, and states around the country. This dissertation offers an interdisciplinary approach that combines the fields of anthropology, education, history, psychology and theology in order for the reader to gain a much deeper and all-encompassing understanding of perceptions and realities of the recently resettled refugees in New Jersey. The practice of reflexive, rather than reflective thinking, will guide the conceptual framework throughout the dissertation and will allow for a different lens through which people view interactions and perceptions of refugees. This study involves a series of interviews with more than twenty stakeholders (volunteers) from four different grassroots organizations in Morris and Union counties located in New Jersey that work directly with recently resettled refugees and encompasses a strengths-based approach that

demonstrates the many positive qualities that our new neighbors bring to their new state. The dissertation culminates with suggestions and direct applications that can be applied by anyone who would like to directly engage refugees in their community or learn more about teaching strategies and best practices.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother. She always believed in me and supported everything I wanted to do in life. I miss her kind words and beautiful heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this degree has taken me on a path of discovery that I never thought would happen. I have spent my life wondering “what if” I actually attempted to complete a doctoral dissertation. Well, now I know that dreams can come true. After many years of wondering and doubting myself, I have finally come to the point where I can say that I have completed my dissertation and fulfilled my academic dream. I do not take this lightly and feel obliged to thank many people along the way.

First and foremost, I want to thank my late mother who helped mold me into the inquisitive person that I am today. Although she is no longer here with me to enjoy this accomplishment, I am certain that she, along with my father, are both looking down from heaven overjoyed with a sense of pride in my accomplishment.

I also would like to thank Professor Jonathan Golden for his encouragement, extreme generosity of time, and amazing ability to push me to take academic chances. Professor Natoschia Scruggs was equally as helpful and generous and offered tremendous insight into the world of refugees and incredible writing strategies and revisions. Both of these professors are tremendous assets to any doctoral student, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from two experts in the field who guided me along the daunting task of dissertation completion. Their help and patience will never be forgotten!

I would be remiss not to thank my high school students who supported my dream of earning a doctorate and pushed me to finish. I cannot thank them enough for wanting me to succeed and motivating me along the way.

Finally, I would like to give a special thank you to all my friends and loved ones that never gave up on me. There were countless conversations over too many days and

nights that helped keep my eyes on the prize and they never wavered in their support of my dream. I would like to specifically mention Shirley and her many evenings on ZOOM listening to and reading my chapters as they were being completed. Her comments and questions helped me reimagine certain chapters and critically examine some of my arguments.

ABBREVIATIONS

BRYCS	Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services
ESL	English as a Second Language
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
FRRP	Federal Refugee Resettlement Program
IRC	International Rescue Committee
RAMP	Refugee Assistance Morris Partners
RAP	Refugee Assistance Partners
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SIFE	Students with Interrupted Formal Education
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
VOLAGs	Voluntary Organizations

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ad hoc basis- concerned with a particular end or purpose, formed or used for specific or individual problems or needs (Merriam Webster)

asylee- someone is seeking asylum, a person who has already entered a new country and asks permission to stay

brain drain- the migration of highly educated and credentialed people from a developing economy to an advanced economy

brain waste- the idea that society is not utilizing the skill set refugees bring to their new country

client- term used at the International Rescue Committee for student, a receiver of services

displaced person- someone who was forced to flee their home due to real or perceived fear

Eurocentrism- the tendency (implicit or not) to place Europe and European values and interests at the center of a situation

invisible backpack- the trauma, past experiences and other seen or unknown factors that recently arrived refugee and asylee students bring to the classroom

non-refoulement- the legal right that refugees have to not be forced to return to their home country

personal efficacy- the belief that what you do matters

reflexivity- broadly defined means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference, in the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obviously level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research (Davies 4), bidirectional/bidirectionality as a synonym

resettlement community- term used for refugees who are actively being assigned places to live upon arrival in America

social and emotional learning- the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and caring decisions (New Jersey Department of Education)

spillover effects- the impact that one event can have on other aspects of life, especially to family or loved ones

stakeholder- someone who has a direct interest or concern in a person, used synonymously with volunteer in this dissertation

stateless- defined by the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Person as someone who is not recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its law (UNHCR- UN Convention on Statelessness)

strengths-based approach- an educational theory that focuses on the strengths of the students and not the deficits

Venn Diagram- a teaching strategy that allows students to see similarities and differences, generally has overlapping circles with differences on the outside and similarities in the middle

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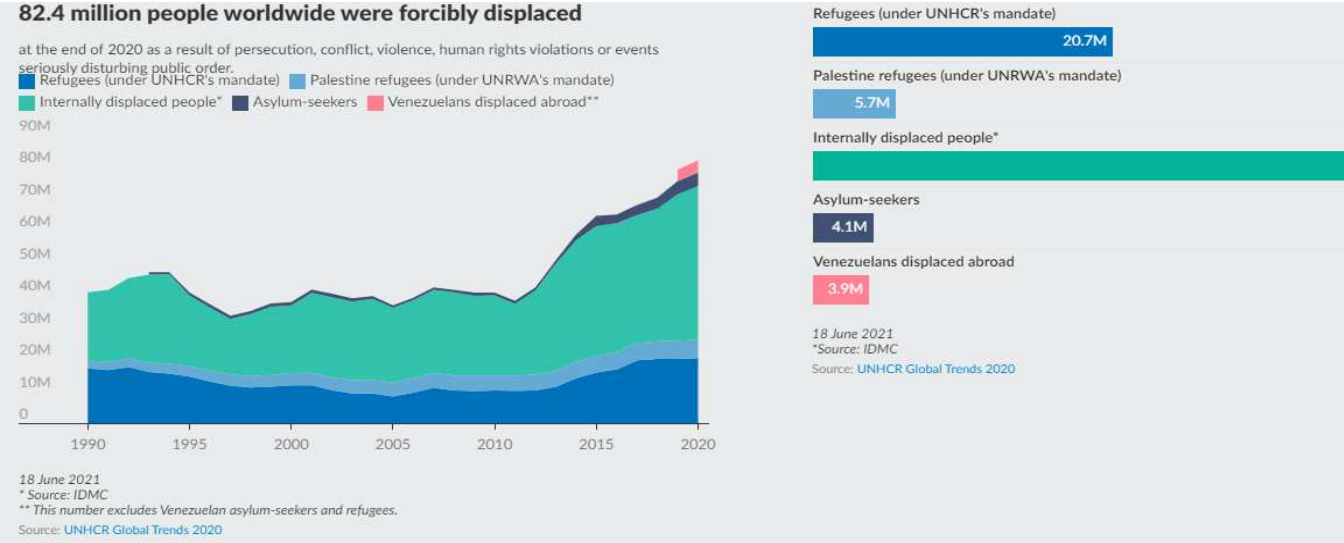
INTRODUCTION

Background

There is an ongoing refugee crisis that has captured the attention of the world. The scope of the problem rivals that of post-World War II and calls into play the perceptions of refugees by citizens of countless countries in the world. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a wonderful source of support for refugees and information for the public. According to UNHCR, as of October 30, 2021, "… at least 82.4 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes" and an estimated 26.4 million are refugees (2021).



The current president of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has slightly different figures for the refugee crisis. The IRC President David Miliband, in his book *Rescue: Refugees and the Political Crisis of Our Time*, puts the number at 65 million people displaced (4). This difference might be because of the terms associated with refugees.

Words that are often used include: asylee, displaced, internally displaced and stateless. All of these terms relate to refugees and often tend to move the numbers in one way or another. Miliband makes an even more compelling case when he notes in his book that all the displaced peoples of the world "account for 1 in every 113 people on the planet. If they came together as a single country, it would be the world's twenty-first largest" (4). Those numbers are startling and demand that the world act to address such a global problem. One such starting point is to understand perceptions that exist about refugees.

Origin of My Dissertation

This dissertation began when I took an Independent Study on refugees and social and emotional learning at Drew University. My professor encouraged me to read as much as possible about refugees and then he told me about the opportunity to be an intern at the International Rescue Committee in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The internship, he said, would be in conjunction with his course on *Refugees and Resettlement*. My role as an intern was to support the university students, and because of my experience as a current high school teacher, to help guide the weekly lessons that they themselves had created. He then told me that the focus of the internship and course would be to teach English as a Second Language for the first hour and then to implement a brand-new curriculum at the IRC on social and emotional learning with the elementary and secondary clients (students) that attend that voluntary enrichment program. Thus, we focused my Independent Study on social and emotional learning and helped the university students create lessons and model them before we implemented them with the clients.

As I began to read the existing literature, I found two sources that inspired me to read more and challenged my core beliefs and understanding about interactions with refugees. The first thing I read was a book about a high school class in Denver, Colorado that had refugee students. *The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship, and Hope in America* was a wonderful introduction to me about the world of refugee students. The author, Helen Thorpe, made the narratives a page turner and forced me to think about all of the amazing ways that these refugee students can achieve and impact the school community and the people they come in contact with. The other thing I remember reading was an article titled "What My Refugee Students Taught Me." I was amazed by what I read and the very premise of the article led me to my dissertation. Instead of discussing how the teacher helped her students, the teacher wrote about how she learned from her students. This is something that I believe happens every day in classrooms but is often not written about. My professor called this being reflexive, not reflective. Ever since that article and subsequent conversation, I have viewed thinking about interactions in a different light. Instead of focusing on what teachers and volunteers can offer refugees, I now look at the interactions as bidirectional and reflexive by seeing the ways in which the engagement impacts the volunteer or teacher just as much as it does the refugee. The art of reflexive engagement and thinking took on a life of its own and drove the entirety of this dissertation and my thought pattern in my job as a teacher.

Conceptual Framework

The idea of reflexive thinking and engagement permeates this study. Reflexivity, rather than reflective analysis, is often a better way to approach thinking about

engagement with students and people because it is more all-encompassing and requires the person to view both sides of engagement. The idea of reflexivity is part of the fields of anthropology and psychology. Further, much has been written about the differences between reflexivity and reflective analysis.

In the field of anthropology reflexive thinking is often linked with reflexive ethnography. Often the anthropological sources consulted discuss reflective and reflexive thinking within sections on ethnography. One such example that offers a clear distinction of the terms is "Reflection and Reflexivity in Anthropology." In the article Robert Rubisntein clearly illustrates the subtle, yet identifiable difference. He writes that "reflection describes those instances when we look back on our experiences in order to form an image of our earlier work" (27). He goes on to state that "reflexivity, in contrast, requires the active analysis and application of our experience to improve data collection and interpretation" (27). Another scholar, Charlotte Aull Davies, put it another, perhaps simpler way. Reflexivity, she writes, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself (4). Instead of thinking how you impacted someone else, you should turn inward and see how the other person impacted you. This is exactly what happened to me when I acted as an intern at the IRC. The professor asked me to study one thing of my choice during the semester internship and then to turn that into my dissertation. The one thing that I clearly noticed was that the clients we worked with taught me, just as much as I taught them. I took this idea and turned it into my dissertation and interviewed volunteers from four different grassroots organizations that often felt the same way as I did. The interactions the volunteers had with the refugees/resettlement community were much more bidirectional in nature and thus the proper term to use in such a review of engagement

was reflexivity, not reflection. Schools of Education often focus on reflective thinking but reflexive thinking "is a skill that must be learned" (Rubinstein 22).

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to interview stakeholders (volunteers) that actually spend time with recently resettled refugees. This dissertation will often use the term resettlement community, instead of refugees, because it is a more sensitive and appropriate term to describe the recently arrived refugees. When does a refugee stop being considered a refugee? This was a question once posed to me during my research by someone active in the field and it has caused me to think about terminology. For the purpose of this dissertation, a refugee is considered part of the resettlement community once they arrive in their new country and begin the process of adapting to their new neighbors and state.

This study interviewed 24 volunteers from 4 grassroots organizations located in Morris and Union counties, New Jersey. The stakeholders were asked a series of questions about perceptions they had of the resettlement community they engage with. Even though there are many academic articles and books that exist that study volunteers to some extent, an exhaustive search found very scant reference to such studies in New Jersey. Therefore, this study is significant because it can offer a glimpse into two different counties in New Jersey that support the resettlement community and possibly change perceptions of people who have never actually met someone who is a refugee. One-by-one minds and perceptions can change and the best people to help in that effort is

the stakeholder. They are your neighbors, friends, teachers, college students, and as this dissertation will show, these stakeholders simply want the American public to learn about their level of engagement with the resettlement community and all of the great qualities and skills that the resettlement community has brought to two counties in New Jersey. The relative novelty of reflexive thinking can be an invaluable tool for measuring the success of engagement and can challenge perceptions people have of their recently resettled "new neighbors."

A Roadmap of Organization

This dissertation is divided into 6 chapters. Each chapter allows the reader to gain a more meaningful and holistic understanding of the resettlement community in the country, and two counties in New Jersey in particular. The first chapter is a literature review covering articles and books written since 2010. The field of refugee studies is so timely that it requires an understanding of the most recent scholarship in the field.

Chapter Two discusses refugee legislation since World War II. There are four major pieces of legislation that are important for the reader to learn about that informs discussion about refugees in the modern era. Chapter Three is about the value of volunteering. The chapter delves into the benefits that volunteers receive from helping others. These benefits are scientifically proven and range from altruism to psychological and physical health.

Chapters Four and Five are the interviews of stakeholders that work directly with the resettlement community. There are 24 interviews in total and they contribute to oral history and the practice of reflexive thinking.

The final chapter is about direct applications that teachers can implement from this dissertation. The goal of this dissertation has always been to help reimagine the narrative surrounding refugees and offer tools for people to use when engaging refugees or discussing refugees with people who have never met, nor engaged one of the many new neighbors who have been resettled in New Jersey.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to give a broad overview of the literature surrounding refugees and resettlement communities in America. The articles, monographs, websites, and other sources reviewed all were written no earlier than 2010. The reason the literature reviewed is over the past decade is because the subject of refugees and resettlement is such a timely topic that requires the most recent scholarship available to accurately depict the struggles, survival, and often success that the community has encountered in their new country.

This chapter is divided into six sections. Each section has a specific focus that directly relates to the resettlement community. Within each section, with the exception of the first one, a minimum of three sources will be examined and reviewed. Section one deals with the "History and Origin of Refugee Studies," and shows how and why the subject is worthy of being a distinct discipline. Section two examines "Volunteering with Refugees," and demonstrates the various ways that volunteers engage with the community. Section three is comprised of "Narratives," and offers glimpses into the lives of resettlement members that helps humanize them but also worries about marginalization. Section four analyzes "Education and Resettlement Students" and will go into detail about academic concerns, struggles, and successes that the resettlement community has faced. Section five is entitled "Religious Organizations and Resettlement Assistance" and will analyze the role faith-based organizations play in the daily life of resettlement members. The final section, section six, is "Gaps in Resettlement Research."

The objective is to show how there are still glaring gaps that need to be studied and the ways in which this current dissertation will attempt to fill such gaps.

Before entering into detail about specific sections of the Literature Review, I would be remiss if there were not a disclaimer. This chapter attempts to offer the reader an overview of aspects about the resettlement community within America. This chapter does not deal with refugee camps that dot the world. Resettlement begins at the "camps" but that is not the focus of this dissertation. However, if interested in such a book, the author directs the reader to *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp* by Ben Rawlence. This is a very compelling book and humanizes the people who reside in "camps." In addition, this is not a chapter, nor a dissertation, that traces the origins of refugees in history. If one wants a more comprehensive and thorough history of refugees in the twentieth century, the author recommends a book by one of academia's leading scholars, Peter Gatrell. *The Making of the Modern Refugee* is a must-read for anyone who wants to better understand history and refugees. If one wants a history of refugees in America, the author recommends *Safe Haven: A History of Refugees in America* by David Haines.

History and Origin of Refugee Studies

The field of refugee and forced migration studies is a relatively recent addition to academia. Bobby Thomas Cameron discusses in his article "Reflections on Refugee Studies and the Study of Refugees: Implications for Policy Analysts" the beginning of this field of study. He states that "the birth of refugee studies as a separate field of study

has no definitive starting point and it can be said that its development has been piecemeal" (6). The study of resettlement communities is a specific part of refugee studies and has an even more ambiguous starting point. Cameron goes on to discuss the different stages of development of the academic discipline and finishes by giving the dates between "1982-2000 where refugee studies as an academic field emerged" (7). Due to the recent emergence of this field of study, one needs to view the literature from a series of lenses. In order to accomplish such a task, the necessity of having an interdisciplinary approach is best.

The literature surrounding this field is ripe with anthropologists, economists, psychologists, sociologists, theologians and others that add to the scholarship and offer a much more balanced and nuanced approach than simply one field alone can offer. By combining all of the aforementioned academic disciplines, refugee studies is continuing to grow and adding to its place in the academy. Largely though the interdisciplinary approach are scholars and students of the subject matter able to get a fuller and more complete picture of the resettlement community in America. Joseph Harris' *Rewriting; How to Do Things with Texts* illustrates clearly why and how different points of view and disciplines are needed. He argues in his book that the goal of academic writing is not "to have the final word" but to advance the conversation (35). By studying a wide range of genres, scholars, and writers, the conversation will be advanced and different points of view and areas of study will be incorporated.

Study of Volunteers

The true heroes in resettlement study are certainly the resettlement members themselves. As will be discussed in the next section, there is an ever-growing body of literature that involves "giving voice" to the community members. This current section analyzes the ways in which volunteers/stakeholders, engage with, and often learn from, the resettlement community.

A very interesting study about volunteering with members of the resettlement community was written by Jennifer Erickson. She is a professor of anthropology at Ball State University and conducted research in Fargo, North Dakota. Her research examined resettlement community members (she used the term refugees) that were paired with English as a Second Language volunteers. These volunteers were both college students and senior citizens. In her article "Volunteering with Refugees: Neoliberalism, Hegemony, and (Senior) Citizenship," she argues that the elderly volunteers had a specific role that benefited a specific group. "Elderly volunteers in Fargo served the state by molding refugees into 'proper' worker citizens, teaching them how to speak English, how to dress, how to behave, how to get a job, and to attend appointments on time" (168). Thus, the role of volunteers is not only to help the resettlement community but to serve the state. Her other position is that "volunteers in refugee resettlement serve as foot soldiers for hegemonic forms of citizenship in comparable ways" to missionaries in colonial South Africa (167).

A second invaluable aspect of Erickson's study is why volunteers choose to volunteer. There were three main reasons Erickson discovered that drove volunteers. The

reasons were volunteering as an "expression of citizenship," the role of Christianity in their lives, and a desire to fight racism, discrimination, and xenophobia (171). She continued in the article to cite specific volunteers and their unique reasons for working with the resettlement community as tutors. The elderly volunteers often mentioned that they grew from the experience and largely enjoyed working with their newly arrived neighbors. However, there was scant to no evidence of understanding the ways in which the resettlement members actually influenced or changed the lives of the elderly volunteers. What Erickson did mention was the case of one volunteer named Shirley that stated through her interactions as a volunteer that she "recognized privilege and diversity in new ways" (173).

A second example of literature regarding volunteers is by Brown University. The three authors of *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter* are accomplished medical and clinical providers. They published a commentary titled "Lessons of Resilience Provided by Refugee Children." The observations made by the authors were based on engagement with members of the resettlement community. The authors argue that the resettlement members are a benefit, not a burden. They wrote that "we have had the privilege to experience firsthand the ways that refugee families can enrich and teach the larger communities where they are settled" (Lewis et al. 8). This opportunity to experience firsthand their new neighbors and learn from them is what academic studies and various observations of volunteers seem to be lacking. Fortunately, these three authors are able to present a different narrative about the resettlement community that many members of the towns, counties, and states do not get to hear too often.

These three experts later discussed the role of resilience and the importance it plays in life. This article is similar, yet slightly different, from another scholar who studies the concept of "Grit." Angel Lee Duckworth is a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and is arguably the world's leading expert on this topic. This section of the Literature Review will not go into detail about the concept of grit because there were no articles that could be found that she wrote about refugees/resettlement community and grit. However, the ideas of grit and resilience are part of the backbone of many members of the resettlement community and need to be studied and become part of the public discourse.

The third type of literature regarding the resettlement communities across America is by popular, less academic books. In this case, the book in question, *Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team that Changed the World*, follows school-age soccer players that are part of the resettlement community in Clarkston, Georgia, less than twenty miles outside of Atlanta. The book tells the story of a young Jordanian female coach and her recreational soccer team, "The Fugees." This book became a national best seller and the coach, Luma Mufleh, has been recognized by CNN and colleges across the country. Coach Mufleh argues throughout the book that, regardless of past circumstances and trauma these athletes have faced, they are capable of tremendous success and are bright spots in their community. According to the Outcasts United website, "over 100 colleges and universities have selected *Outcasts United* as required reading for incoming freshmen" (St. John). The success of the book and the refugee athletes, speaks directly to the importance of first-hand accounts, written outside of academia, about just what the resettled refugees can offer society.

This book is especially helpful because it demonstrates how resilient and hard-working the resettlement community is. In spite of soccer players coming from refugee camps around the world, in spite of struggling with poverty and the push-and-pull of outside factors that influence teenagers to make poor decisions, in spite of internal-ethnic differences amongst the players, this team was able to largely stay together and thrive. All along the way Coach Mufleh was able to show the town of Clarkston that her players simply wanted to play soccer, have fun, and be teenagers, indiscernible from other teenagers in the area. Through active engagement with the resettlement community, the book demonstrates the beauty and success that the resettlement community brought to this sleepy, little town. Mufleh recognizes that not everything is perfect and "freely admits that the Fugees hasn't worked for everyone" (St. John 225). However, what program does work for everyone? The answer is obvious, none. The Fugees and this book represent what society can gain and understand from simply engaging with the resettlement community members. Although the Coach did not detail very often in the book ways in which the players changed her life and shaped her worldviews on refugees and resettlement, at least it is a good introduction for people who have never had the chance to meet someone who was resettled in their community or county. No one piece of literature is perfect, but this book is a good first start to recognize the strengths and incredible amount of resilience that the resettlement community can bring to a sleepy, little town in America.

Narratives of Refugees

One way to express the experiences, struggles, and accomplishments of the refugee and resettlement community is through narrative. These narratives can be written by members of the resettlement community, or by authors and academics that write on their behalf. The literature that encompasses this field of study is established and growing. This Literature Review will evaluate three such pieces.

Ideally, members of the resettlement community will tell their own story, using their own words, and not have to rely on an outsider to speak on their behalf. One such book that accomplishes that objective is *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*. The book consists of seventeen different writers from countries across the globe, themselves refugees, who write about their experiences and now share their stories with the wider world. The book's editor compiled the works and made sure that the reader did not forget who the contributors are because of the success they have achieved and often their high-level of assimilation. Viet Thank Nguyen writes that "I was once a refugee, although no one would mistake me for being a refugee now. Because of this, I insist on being called a refugee, since the temptation to pretend that I am not a refugee is strong. It would be so much easier to call myself an immigrant, to pass myself off as belonging to a category of migratory humanity that is less controversial (11). As this Literature Review will discuss in later sections, perceptions of refugees and the resettlement community are an important, and often controversial aspect, of their story and experience here in America.

A second noteworthy book that utilizes narrative is written by Hao Lam from Vietnam. There are a considerable number of accounts written by members of the resettlement community themselves and this trend will likely continue to grow in the future. In his book *From Bad to Worse to Best in Class: A Refugee's Success Story*, he describes his journey from Vietnam to the Philippines, to Canada, and finally to the United States. In the book he retraces his journey from a refugee camp in the Philippines onto his final destination in Seattle, Washington and his career in education and as an entrepreneur. Throughout the book Lam discusses his struggles of being an ethnic Chinese minority in Vietnam, the Vietnam War, his time in jail and later at a refugee camp and his constant worry of being returned to Vietnam. His message of the importance of education and refusal to give up are central tenets of his experience as a refugee and are consistently echoed in his writing. In fact, he was so resilient that he refused to give-up even though he failed more than ten times to escape from Vietnam since 1975 until 1988 (Lam 31). His level of resilience, persistence and drive helped shape him into the person he became and is emblematic of the character of countless refugees that have attempted to start a new life. The thing that sets Lam apart from the others, is that he is able to tell his own story and share it with the world. His words are gripping and page-turning. If only more people were able to read this book and others like it, perhaps countries would be more willing to embrace the people who strive to survive and be productive members of their new community. Lam, eventually made it to Seattle, Washington and opened education centers. He now is in a position to pay-it-forward and help others in a similar position. He writes that "I came here with nothing, and I've been able to build a life because of the support and kindness of my family and

community" (192). Lam is certainly a success story and his words should be read. How many others have not had their voices listened to and have not had a chance to demonstrate all they have to offer to their new country and community?

A concern about narrative is about marginalization and stereotyping. Otieno Kisiara, a professor of anthropology, has written an article titled "*Marginalized at the Centre: How Public Narratives of Suffering Perpetuate Perceptions of Refugees' Helplessness and Dependency*." This article evolved out of Kisiara's attendance at events where refugees shared their stories and experiences. He mentions in his study how the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees invites refugees to speak because they "provide a vital reality check to other stakeholders." (Kisiara 163). He does not object to them telling their life stories and engaging the audience. However, he is concerned about how they are presented, how they are marginalized, and how they are often overshadowed by the presenters. Kisiara argues that "refugee speakers, once positioned at the podium, become objects of display" (165). When there is a deeper discussion about refugees, resettlement, and public policy, he goes even further into his criticism and concerns about the events. He cites three examples in which there was a public policy debate but "the refugee speaker sat silently at the podium, more like a museum object, observed, talked about, and talked over" (167). Towards the end of the study, he offers "alternative ways to center refugee voices" and believes that such forums are worthy and necessary to give voice to such an important situation (169).

Education and Resettlement Students

Education is an essential part of the American experience that members of the resettlement community face when they arrive. For many, education can be a way to advance in society and an opportunity to realize the "American Dream." There is an ever-growing body of literature that attempts to capture the educational experiences, struggles, and successes in their new environments. This section of the Literature Review will discuss all those aspects and one other, the ways in which the teachers and staff have been impacted by the newly arrived students they service at school.

The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship, and Hope in America is an award-wining book that details the experiences of newly arrived immigrants and refugee students at a high school in Denver, Colorado. The author of the book, Helen Thorpe, spent a year in an ESL classroom getting to know these newly arrived students and watched firsthand how the school and students merged into a positive, caring, and nurturing environment in Mr. Williams' classroom. Thorpe is able to offer background on particular families and countries they originated from and helps the reader get a good understanding of the struggles and later successes of many of the students. Besides describing the observations of the author, Thorpe offers a different approach towards the end of her book and becomes reflexive in her thinking. Instead of focusing on what the students learned in school, she comes to the realization that she learned a great deal about life from the students she spent time with. Thorpe writes, "Meeting people whose life trajectories were so different from my own enlarged my way of thinking" (391). She does not go into detail about ways in which her thinking has been enlarged but does discuss

how important engagement is with refugee resettlement. She states, “that’s what refugee resettlement was, I decided: acts of courage met by acts of generosity” (392). That combination speaks exactly to the strengths of both parties involved and demonstrates the beauty of engagement and reflexive thinking.

A second example of the power of education and the impact it has on students and staff is an article written by Sidney Brown. She wrote an article about her experiences teaching ESL in Florida. The tile of his article demonstrates to the reader just how profoundly she was impacted by her experience. In “What My Refugee Students Taught Me,” Brown recounts how her students used their strengths, charisma, passion, and abilities to impact both the school environment and their teacher. Brown writes that “I witnessed this truth as my students built bridges through a shared passion for justice, the universal language of music, and their willingness to share their personal struggles to inspire students” (79). She mentions in the article the power of narrative and storytelling that her students brought to their new school. In addition, she focuses on other strengths they have and their ability to persevere and impact the culture of the building. Brown notes that “school provided the setting for this grace to take place, but the students themselves broke down the walls” (79). This article speaks directly to the reflexive impact of engagement because it highlights how the students learned a great deal in school but that the school and teacher in the classroom were able to learn from and appreciate how the students helped teach them and helped all parties involved in the learning environment.

Appreciation and respect shown towards the resettlement community is part of the foundation of a successful school experience. Teachers and the District need to spend

time getting to know, not only their new students, but also their families. Selamawit Tadesse is a professor of education at Towson State University, Maryland and conducted research on parent involvement of refugee students from Africa and schools. Her work is based on the experiences of four African refugee mothers and Head Start teachers. She mentioned early in her findings that "the theoretical assumption is that children's success in education is largely influenced by the degree of congruency between school and family regarding their meaning-making within their environments- cultural values, beliefs, customs, and social skills and practices (300). The study gives voice to the African mothers and allows them to share their experiences interacting with the school. The section that deals with "Teachers' Attitudes" is quite compelling because it shows how some parents feel disrespected and marginalized. One mother (Charity) was quite frank with the way she felt minimized. "See, I have a college degree back there [Liberia], they [teachers] might not even have a college degree here, but they still think they know more than me…The teachers sometimes regard me as a person who knows nothing…They don't think that African education is very legitimate" (302). Even though Charity is part of the conversation with the district, she feels left out and not truly listened to. The study attempts to address the quality of such student-parent contact but does not discuss the extent to which these conversations are being had more broadly throughout the country. That is one of the biggest takeaways from this article. If refugee students are often being underserviced and not being properly educated because of language and cultural barriers, what about their parents and school interactions? Do schools engage parents properly and how often?

Religious Organizations and Resettlement Assistance

The role of religion and religious organizations in the lives of members of the resettlement community cannot be overlooked. Countless numbers of our new neighbors bring the language, culture, and religion of their homeland to their new communities. The role of religious organizations is to help the new members of their community to adapt to their new environment. Religious organizations tend to embrace all peoples, whether or not they are adherents or not to their particular organization.

One study of religious organizations focuses on the role of World Relief. This is one of the agencies that works with the U.S. Government to help resettle refuges in America. The organization stresses the biblical foundation of "Welcoming the Neighbor" from both the Old and New Testament. In "Bringing Refugees from Crisis to Flourishing: The Role of Resettlement Agencies in Facilitating Integration and Stability," Mary Baxter cites more than ninety-two times that this concept was mentioned in the Old Testament (20). Baxter includes in her article case studies that emphasize a strengths-based approach and the role of case workers and volunteers. The role of volunteers is highlighted because "the volunteers will be involved much longer than the case manager" (28). The case manager is involved for a period of a few months, but it is the volunteers who stay in contact with the new members of the community and help them adapt and hopefully flourish. The author also discusses, albeit briefly, the impact the resettlement community has on the volunteers themselves. "The volunteers themselves also grow through the experience by gaining knowledge of a new culture, making new friends, and expanding their worldview" (29). Although Baxter only devotes a paragraph to this last

point, she at least acknowledges and gives future researchers ample space to study this further.

A second, more specific study of religious organizations and refugees is by Lissa Schwander. She examines the study of religion and resettlement early in her study. She quotes research done at the beginning of the twenty-first century that argues that "religion has largely been neglected in migration research" (116). This lack of research seems to be on the increase and Schwander's current article is an attempt to add to the literature. In this article she conducts a case study of six male participants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, and Nepal in West Michigan. Due to the small sample size, she notes that "the experiences of these young adults cannot be generalized to the broader refugee population in West Michigan, nor in the United States more broadly" (124). In spite of the study's limitations, the results should be discussed and applied to volunteers and others that work directly with the resettlement community. Schwander argues that "it seems clear that the circumstances of their movement across borders and their arrival in West Michigan matters in terms of religious identification" (123). The faith based voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) play an important role in their lives and do so based on a religious calling and desire to help.

The final article in this section is about how members of faith-based organizations (FBOs) perceive their involvement in refugee resettlement. This is especially important because "more than half of the organizations that contract with the U.S. government to resettle are faith-based" (Roe and Bushnell 35). One such study that analyzed perceptions is "Refugee Empowerment and Faith Communities: A Qualitative Study." This paper was written in wake of President Donald Trump's executive order in 2017 (often referred

to as the Muslim Travel ban). The authors of this article wrote it because "the media have expressed conflicting opinions from church leaders of faith regarding refugee resettlement" (37). The authors conducted interviews of twenty-six participants. The conclusion reached by the two authors is that "even though many participants expressed critique of faith communities, many also expressed how resettlement agencies benefit from faith communities' support" (49). The other important finding was that the participants want to empower the resettlement community and to "understand the truth about refugees vs. the myths that often get expressed as facts" (49). By actively engaging with the resettlement community and firsthand accounts by the volunteers and others, then myths can be corrected, and facts can be brought to the media and the greater community at-large.

Gaps in the Literature

The field of refugee, resettlement and forced migration studies has certainly expanded over the past few decades. There are more and more scholars who have added to the academic canon and the discipline will continue to expand in the future. With regards to the purpose of this particular dissertation, my research has identified gaps in the existing literature. The first such gap entails New Jersey. After an extensive review of the existing literature, I strongly believe that the state of New Jersey is understudied and deserves more attention. This state houses one of the world's leading refugee and resettlement agencies, The International Rescue Committee. In addition, there are grassroots organizations that service the community and are worthy of study.

A second glaring gap is that there are few studies that discuss the stakeholders and reflexivity. There are studies that discuss how stakeholders helped the resettlement community, or how they noted levels of resiliency, work-ethic, and entrepreneurship. However, there are few academic articles that discuss "reflexivity" as it is defined by anthropologists and psychologists. In essence, the nature of reflexivity is bidirectional and demonstrates how both parties are essentially equal partners in the relationship. The reflexive impact of engagement is the conceptual framework that drives this dissertation and one that will be explored in the case studies that follow in subsequent chapters. As was discussed in the Literature Review, volunteers are an essential part of the literature surrounding resettlement in America. However, this dissertation takes a slightly different approach and focuses on volunteers from grassroots organizations in New Jersey and how they perceive the resettlement community based on engagement and reflexive practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Refugee Legislation Since 1945

This chapter attempts to synthesize and analyze major refugee legislation since 1945. The date chosen was deliberate because it refers to both the end of World War II and the creation of the United Nations (UN). The UN plays a critical role in addressing refugees and resettlement within the global community. The legislation surrounding refugees has shaped the way in which they have been accepted and resettled into the UN members. As this chapter will demonstrate, passage of legislation has often been a turning point in the history of refugees and speaks directly to historical events that were transpiring during each specific act of legislation.

There are four major legislative acts that will be discussed in this chapter. First, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the groundbreaking moment it represents in the modern history of refugees and protections offered will be examined. The second legislative act to be analyzed is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This piece of legislation enacted laws and a working definition of refugees that continue to impact the status of refugees and the resettlement community around the globe. Next, this chapter will highlight the profound impact the 1967 Protocol made on the geographic limitations placed on refugees in prior legislation. Lastly, the Refugee Act of 1980 -the requirements, possible limitations, and brief history of its impact on American society and refugees will be analyzed.

The history of refugees and questions around the legislation passed to protect them globally could be approached from different perspectives. In *Americans at the Gates: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War*, historian Carl J. Bon Tempo mentions that "much of the literature on the United States and refugees has been written by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and legal scholars" (2). Perhaps these different scholars, representing a multitude of academic disciplines, choose to begin their discussion on legislation from points in time that bear significance for points they are trying to make in their work. Nonetheless, this dissertation focuses on the period beginning in 1945 because it represents the end of the Second World War as well as the birth of the UN and its many affiliated organizations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Begun in 1950, UNHCR is the world's leading refugee and resettlement organization and has impacted the lives of countless peoples fleeing war-torn and unstable countries. This organization, and its partners, were needed because of the conditions left behind after the Second World War. Immediately after WWII the global community was faced with the horrors of the aftermath of such a devasting global crisis. In addition to figuring out how to rebuild the societies that had been directly impacted by fighting, the question of the status of refugees needed to be addressed. David W. Haines, Jessica Goudeau, and David Miliband are three scholars and practitioners who treat the topics of refugees and resettlement.

In *Safe Haven: A History of Refugees in America*, anthropologist David W. Haines argues that the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 is a beginning of refugee resettlement in America (xii). Jessica Goudeau agrees with Professor Haines and

discusses the impact of the legislation in her book, *After the Last Border: Two Families and the Story of Refuge in America*. Goudeau states that "it was one of the earliest instances of the American government's officially recognizing refugees' unique circumstances as victims of war and creating a separate immigration policy- not yet a program- to bring many of them to this country (14). David Miliband is the current President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), an organization with a tremendous global footprint that is at the forefront of refugee resettlement globally. In his book, *Rescue: Refugees and the Political Crisis of Our Time*, Miliband indicates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the best starting point. Immediately after mentioning the 40 million refugees caused by World War II, he writes that "it was clear that the world had to establish rights for civilians who had been caught up in the war" and that legislation was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (36). This debate is interesting to discuss but the most important thing to remember is that post- World War II created refugee rights and legislation that impacted the global community and the world's most vulnerable peoples yearning for a sense of security and protection. Thus, for the purpose of this paper the starting point of refugee legislation that will be discussed is the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has had a tremendous impact on the world of refugees and the recognition of universal rights and dignity of all peoples in the world. Whether viewed as a turning point, watershed moment, or a

milestone, the significance of the UDHR should not be understated. Quite simply, the writing and acceptance of this legislation laid the groundwork for refugee rights and resettlement. This was necessary because by 1945 “more than 40 million refugees were spread across Europe. By 1947, after mass returns, there were still 7 million people in resettlement camps for displaced people” (Miliband 36). The question was now how to address this pressing issue of refugees and their rights.

A very good starting point to get an understanding of the impact of the UDHR is the UN. There is an article on the UNHRC’s website that directly addresses the document and spells-out the thirty articles it represents and each right and privilege associated with it. The introduction on the United Nations’ website highlights just how important this document is in world history. According to the website, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights “sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected and it has been translated into over 500 languages” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1). Moreover, of the five major architects of this international law, at least three of them mentioned just how historical and momentous the creation of the document was. Eleanor Roosevelt called it the “Magna Carta of all men everywhere” and Lebanese diplomat, Charles Malik, believed it was “destined to mark an important state in the history of mankind” (McFarland 109). The two-year story behind the writing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not part of the scope of this dissertation but is carefully detailed in an article written by Professor Sam McFarland titled “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Tribute to Its Architects.” The one take-away from McFarland’s article that is directly applicable to this chapter is that a debate existed about the original term “international” and that “universal” was accepted because “the

Declaration was not just an agreement between nations but was a statement that human rights rightfully belong to everyone and are morally binding on everyone, not just the governments that voted to adopt it" (117).

All thirty of the articles that comprise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are worthy of praise and careful analysis. Professor Micheline Ishay, Director of the International Human Rights Program at the University of Denver, wrote a very thought-provoking article celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She wrote that sometimes the human rights are clustered into four pillars. However, she reminds the reader to remember that "the unique contribution of the UN Declaration resides in the effort to bring those principles within the rubric of one comprehensive approach. The drafters had reached the conclusion that one cluster of rights could not be privileged over another. Human rights were inalienable and indivisible" (15). Yes, the human rights established and agreed upon by the commission and countries that signed-on to the legislation all are absolutely necessary and fundamental aspects of the human experience. However, for the scope of this dissertation, one article in particular will receive significant attention.

The terms asylum and refugee are often used synonymously. However, there are nuances of difference in their meanings. Asylum happens when an asylee asks permission to remain in another country when they are actually within the new country's borders. A refugee status implies that the refugee is outside of a country that they would like to seek resettlement within. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights helped create a legal definition of asylum. Article 14 of the Declaration instituted what is often referred to as "the right to asylum." The exact wording states that "everyone has the right to seek and

to enjoy in other counties asylum from protection" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1). According to the authors of *The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: The Politics and Practice of Refugee Protection into the Twenty-First Century*, Article 14 had a dramatic impact on asylum and refugee status and protections it offered. The authors state that "the shift from group to individual protection and the new emphasis on human rights proved significant for the future direction of international refugee protection" (Loescher et al. 11).

The impact of the UDHR cannot be understated. There is ample evidence that it has helped foster other legislation and offer peoples from all over the globe dignity and rights enshrined in a document which is recognized by most countries in the world. McFarland argues unequivocally that "the Declaration has inspired great advances in human rights. It led to the creation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, covenants that turned the Declaration's ideals into international law" (121).

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

The year 1951 marked a profound change to refugee legislation. That was the year in which the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was held and many aspects of refugee and resettlement principles were established. Some of the legal principles that were established were the legal definition of a refugee, the principle of non-refoulment, a shift from groups to individuals, an anti-communist and Eurocentric view of refugee resettlement were promulgated, and admissions and assistance programs

were created. Also of note was that The United States approached refugees and resettlement during this time period very differently than it does in present times. The change that took place will be discussed when the Refugee Act of 1980 is analyzed towards the end of this chapter. However, one immediate difference the reader can gleam with the four pieces of refugee legislation in this chapter is that "until the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States admitted refugees on an ad hoc basis" (Brown and Scribner 102).

One of the most important things done at the convention was to establish a working legal definition of the term refugee. Article I of the General Provisions section found on the UNHCR's website gives the following definition that was agreed upon: a refugee is someone who has 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; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (General Provisions 14).

This definition of refugee is now a central tenant of international refugee law and offers refugees protections and the opportunity to seek international assistance in the resettlement process. Although having a legal and working definition of refugee were essential parts of the 1951 Convention, they were far from the only aspects that still are seen and utilized today in the field of refugee and resettlement studies.

A second principle established is found in Article 33 of the Convention. This Article established the legal principle of non-refoulement. Essentially, non-refoulement makes it illegal to force a refugee to return to his/her home country or another country that they fear would put their life in danger. The reality is that refugees are some of the most vulnerable and traumatized peoples in the world and should not be required by a host country to return to a country they just escaped from, or a neighboring country that might want to do them harm. The 1951 Convention offers a sense of protection and a legal right not to be refouled. The importance of non-refoulement cannot be overstated and offers protection and security that are needed for the refugees who are actually able to receive it. In reality, refugees only receive this right when they either make it to a refugee camp or get resettled somewhere. Article 33 might offer this right in theory, but the application of it is of equal or greater importance.

Non-refoulement is a principle that is essential in the resettlement process. Due to the importance of this concept, there are activists, laypeople, and scholars who comment on it and think that it does not go far enough and think its application is not equally applied. In the *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, attorney Ellen D'Angelo states that "the implementation of non-refoulement is inconsistent among states and the destiny of many refugees depends upon whether they reach the border of a state that interprets Article 33 more favorably than its neighbor" (280). Thus, although it might be agreed upon to practice non-refoulement, there are times that countries tend to interpret Article 33 in such a way that excludes refugees from entering and therefore exercising said right. D'Angelo does not exclude The United States from such a practice. She notes one such example of Haitians being intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard and being denied entry

and implies that there have been other examples throughout the history of The United States since the 1951 Convention. (292).

A third component of the 1951 Convention was the overwhelming opposition to communism and the acceptance of refugees fleeing communist countries. This was especially the case in The United States. Miliband calls this approach to refugees and resettlement "a myopia" (37). In fact, the term refugee after the Second World War was used "almost exclusively to anticommunist dissenters and victims" (Goudeau 163). The world was in a Cold War and the Europeans escaping communist rule were given special treatment. This was obviously a case of Eurocentrism and excluded the plight of countless individuals being persecuted around the world at that time.

The extent of this anti-communist, Eurocentric approach to refugees is best illustrated by comparing what happened to different peoples after the War. One such account of this bias and exclusion recounts that "there were no airlifts for the 750,000 Palestinians who became refugees in 1950. There were no US-government- promoted PR campaigns for the 385,000 Chinese citizens relocated by the Chinese Cultural Revolution between 1950 and 1954" (Goudeau 163). On the other hand, the Hungarians fleeing their revolution in 1956 that led to the establishment of a communist dictator and influence of the former Soviet Union, were warmly welcomed and resettled in the United States. Peter Pastor, professor emeritus of history, notes that approximately 30,000 resettled Hungarians received positive attention, "generating an outpouring of enormous sympathy, which was reflected in the media" and led to Time Magazine naming the "Hungarian Freedom Fighter" as Man of the Year (199). The historical facts speak for themselves and clearly indicate that this 1951 Convention helped many but was clearly

based on anti-communist hysteria and did little to nothing to help non-European nations. This is undeniable and must be considered when analyzing the great contributions of the 1951 Convention but that does not mean that history should gloss over other areas of the world that needed help and resettlement. Fortunately, there was a 1967 Protocol that would later address such limitations. "Anticommunism has been crucial to virtually all refugee admissions up until the 1990s" but the Eurocentric preference was fundamentally altered in the 1967 Protocol (Haines 4). That Protocol will be discussed as the events of the Convention are developed and analyzed throughout the subsequent pages.

An often overlooked and understudied aspect of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is Article 19, "Liberal Professions." This Article has the potential to offer refugees and the resettlement community tremendous economic opportunities and the chance to quickly improve their socio-economic status in their new country. The Article has two parts and reads the following:

1. "Each Contracting State shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory who hold diplomas recognized by the component authorities of' that State, and who are desirous of practicing liberal profession, treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances."

2. The Contracting States shall use their best endeavors consistently with their

> laws and constitutions to secure the settlement of such refugees in the territories, other than the metropolitan territory, for whose international relations they are responsible." (General Provisions 23)

In most works consulted there is little to no mention of this right to practice "liberal professions." As mentioned earlier in this chapter, legal scholars and advocates often are involved in writing about, and often defending, the rights of members of the resettlement community. In the case of Article 19, attorney Shanique Campbell wrote an article in the *Emory Law Journal* about the importance of this Article and its implementation. The title of her article speaks directly to her main arguments. "What's a Sundial in the Shade?": Brain Waste among Refugee Professionals who are Denied Meaningful Opportunity for Credential Recognition" demonstrates that refugees have the legal right, based on the 1951 Convention, to practice "liberal professions." Again, this is a right that was agreed upon by all signatures of the 1951 Convention and not just a theoretical argument. Quite simply, the law is the law and needs to be offered to everyone within the host country. Her other point about "brain waste" is a concept that should not be overlooked and should be embraced by all parties that agreed to the rights and legal obligations agreed to at the Convention. Instead of discussing "brain drain," perhaps the idea of brain waste should be had by politicians who help frame refugee legislation. The resettlement community has a hidden skill set that needs to be embraced by host countries and is too often overlooked by critics and people who do not take the time to read the entirety of the 1951 Convention's laws, especially Article 19.

If Article 19 were implemented immediately, there would be many opportunities for the recently resettled refugees. Campbell calls this a "hidden class of refugees in

America, a class whose size is unknown, but comprises highly skilled and educated professional who spent many years honing their craft" (141). Essentially, they are being denied the right to practice "liberal professions." Campbell recognizes that "ambiguity" of "liberal professions" is a concern but that it can be "resolved by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties" (149). In addition, she writes that recognizing credentials from abroad is one of the key problems with Article 19 and the fact that "there remains a gap between the de jure and de facto enforcement" of its implementation (143). In short, there is an untapped source of human capital that could potentially greatly help their new host country. The resettlement community has the legal right to practice "liberal professions" and many, the exact number is unknown, have the immediate skill set to help improve the lives of the greater community and quickly ascend to a better socio-economic status as members of the resettlement community. This important article of the 1951 Convention needs to be addressed and further litigated so that the rights enshrined in the groundbreaking document are more readily accessible. Campbell offers many suggestions and her legal opinions about Article 19 are nuanced and clearly based in law, and they should be part of the conversation about the legal rights associated with the transformative document protecting and aiding some of the world's most vulnerable peoples, the resettlement community.

The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

Refugee legislation was further strengthened in 1967, when the protections offered under the 1951 Convention extended beyond the original limits imposed. The

1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees fundamentally shifted the global conversation about refugees and removed the geographic limitations that were essentially restricted to Europe. As Miliband of the IRC writes, only after the 1967 Protocol was the "mandate extended to establish universal coverage for the rights drawn up in 1951" (37). Legislation was now applied to the global community and not exclusively to Europeans fleeing communist regimes.

The 1967 Protocol recognized the anti-colonization struggle that impacted countless peoples in the world in the 1950s and 1960s, specifically in Africa and Asia, and led to the liberation and creation of new countries. With the yearning for freedom and end of colonial rule in many parts of the world, there was an obvious growth of refugees that was generated. As mentioned by Loescher, Betts and Milner, this new Protocol was important because the 1951 Convention "did not reflect the emerging refugee crises in their regions" and "many of these states considered the 1951 Convention to be irrelevant to their situation, given that the refugee definition was limited to European refugees resulting from events prior to 1951" (100). Thus, the importance of the new legislation in 1967 fundamentally altered the global community's response to refugees and gave hope to peoples outside of Europe facing threats different from those faced in Europe during and after World War II.

Refugee Act of 1980

The Refugee Act of 1980 was born out of the historical circumstances of the mid-1960s and decade of the 1970s. The year 1965 was a watershed event in American

history because of the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This piece of legislation abolished the national origins system and largely ended immigration preference from Western Europe and permitted greater percentages of immigration from other parts of the globe. Just as the 1967 Protocol ended geographic limitations, so did the 1965 Immigration Act in America. In addition, the 1970s saw the so-called "Indochinese boat people" fleeing parts of Asia and led to "one of the largest mass migrations of political refugees and economic migrants in history" (Goudeau 187). With this backdrop came the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 and the requirements that would be placed on refugees entering America. This new law also changed the approach America had to refugee admission. "Until the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States admitted refugees on an ad hoc basis" and afterwards there would be a standardized approach (Brown and Scribner 102). Although this was a significant change, the Act had other requirements that were to be followed.

One of the key requirements of the new legislation was that refugees that were resettled had to become economically self-sufficient. This is a cornerstone of the American policy towards refugee resettlement and integration. In spite of some questioning of the exact meaning of "self-sufficiency" by people in the field of resettlement and refugee studies, this has remained an essential part of life for the resettlement community that lives in The United States.

A second requirement of the Act is English language competence. Professor Haines notes in *Safe Haven* that the mandate to learn English was based on "the essential reasonableness of this emphasis on English language competence was strongly supported by the early research on Southeast Asia refugees in the United States" (147). In fact, he

asserts that there was a correlation between English competence and economic success (147). These requirements of economic self-sufficiency and English competence were two important aspects of the Act, but there were others.

When President Jimmy Carter signed the Refugee Act of 1980 into law, he also established agencies to help support the newly resettled refugees. The law "established the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program (FRRP) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement" (Goudeau 191). These newly created agencies would help ease the transition from refugee camp to eventual pathway to becoming part of the American community and new neighbors to the citizens of their newly adopted country.

Another crucial aspect of the Act was for The United States to clarify its definition of refugee and fully embrace the established legal definition of what a refugee is. Under the new legislation, "the U.S. finally amended its language to match the 1967 UNHCR Refugee Protocol" (Goudeau 191). This change has remained in place to the present and demonstrates that a world superpower is accepting of the term refugee and all of the implications and responsibilities that entails.

Conclusion

In conclusion, refugee legislation has helped establish a legal definition of what a refugee is and what rights they have. The way in which refugee legislation has changed since 1945 is both interesting and stark. The obvious Eurocentric bias and anti-communist leaning of early refugee legislation was changed dramatically in 1967 and later in 1980. Legislation since 1967 has been much more inclusive and embracing of

global realities and frailties. This new approach has changed the approach to refugee admission and resettlement within The United States and has resulted in “some four million refugees for resettlement since the Second World War” entering America (Haines 7). The realities of the world indicate that the scope of the problem is much larger than simply 4 million refugees needing resettlement. However, both the international legislation and the Refugee Act of 1980 in America are the starting point of the conversation and global outreach to aid in resettlement. The world’s refugee problem is not easily solved and will almost certainly require new and improved legislation in the future. Fortunately, the global community has proven that they can work together to help alleviate, to some degree, the plight of refugees and offer them much needed international rights and protections.

CHAPTER III

The Impact of Volunteering on the Volunteer

The importance of volunteering cannot be overstated. There is a vast deal of literature that attests to the beneficial nature of volunteerism. Often people view volunteerism as simply rewarding but the research is clear that the act of volunteerism is medically, psychologically and socially advantageous to the volunteer. In addition, the act of volunteerism is bidirectional in nature in the sense that the volunteer gains as much from the experience (if not more) than does the receiver of the services. That fact is often overlooked and the principle goal of this chapter is to share the evidence that highlights those findings with the general public.

The study of volunteerism requires an interdisciplinary approach to get a much broader and insightful look into the benefits of the practice. Fields such as gerontology, medicine and psychology offer unique perspectives and journals such as *Health and Social Behavior*, *The Gerontologist* and the *Journal of Gerontology* are invaluable sources of information and scholarly material. The multidisciplinary approach offered in the field of volunteerism is similar to the dissertation's focus on refugee studies because neither discipline is complete without the support of a wide range of scholarship that allows the reader to gain a much deeper understanding of the breadth of the academic field and all of the different studies and literature that surround them. Moreover, the two case studies that follow in the subsequent chapters interview volunteers (stakeholders) that engage directly with the resettlement community and then analyze the ways in which

the volunteers helped and were impacted in a positive and rewarding way by such engagement.

This chapter will be divided into four main sections. The first section deals with a general definition of volunteering and a very brief history of the field. The second section deals with general findings about the benefits that volunteerism has on the volunteer. The third section will focus on younger, more college-age students and the fourth chapter will focus on retirees and older volunteers. Sections two and three are two areas that are well-researched and there is ample evidence to support the claim that volunteering clearly has a positive influence on the volunteer. What the chapter will not discuss is the ways in which the volunteer impacts the person or community that he/she engages. There is already a lot of anecdotal evidence that the general public has about that relationship. In addition to anecdotal evidence, there is scholarly research to prove such a claim. In the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* there is an article from Vanderbilt University professors that states "volunteer work is widely believed to be beneficial not only for the community but for individuals who perform it" (Thoits and Hewitt 115). However, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the overwhelming empirical evidence that has been written and published in academic circles that the public and future volunteers can learn from.

General Definition and Brief History

Before this chapter continues any further, it is important to have a common working definition of what volunteering or volunteerism is. In fact, the two words are

used interchangeably and connote the same general meaning. The question to be addressed is what a good working definition of volunteering or volunteerism is. Based on a review of the existing literature, the answer is not so simple. As it turns out, different scholars use slightly different definitions. In my review of academic publications, I came across three different definitions. The terms vary from a definition used by the President's Task Force on Sector Initiatives to dictionary and textbook definitions that have various interpretations. What is not in question is that the history of volunteering dates back to Alexis de Tocqueville and his comments on American democracy that were encapsulated in his book *Democracy in America* from the early to mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the field of volunteering has a literature spanning over three decades that documents the positive relationship between volunteering and well-being (Morrow-Howell et al. 137). The two groups most studied seem to be adolescents and young college-age students and older adults, often retirees. The following section explains some general findings about volunteerism and the impact volunteering has on the volunteer.

General Findings

As stated above, there is undeniable scientific evidence about the benefits of volunteer work. These benefits extend in both directions and seem quite compelling. Two scholars in the field, John Wilson and Marc Musick put it succinctly when they write that "it is widely believed that helping others is as beneficial for the donor as it is for the recipient" (167). One organization outside of academia that has published their findings is the Mayo Clinic. This is a medical organization based in America that is very reputable

and consistently addresses medical issues that face the nation. In the case of volunteerism, the Mayo Clinic has published about this phenomenon and even has volunteers at their facility. In an article they released in 2017 they listed six health benefits of volunteering (Helping People). The six are as follows:

1. Volunteering decreases the risk of depression
2. Volunteering gives a sense of purpose and teaches valuable skills
3. Volunteering helps people stay physically and mentally active
4. Volunteering may reduce stress levels
5. Volunteering may help you live longer
6. Volunteering helps you meet others and develop new relationships.

Each of these benefits is worthy of a much more detailed and elaborate discussion then will be analyzed by this abbreviated but concise section. Volunteers of all ages share many of these rewards and possibly other ones that are still yet to be researched and discovered. The Mayo Clinic makes it quite evident that the act of volunteering is one that has many health benefits, some that are noticed and others that are not, but are proven through research and academic studies.

The research that is often published tends to focus on the benefits of volunteering for the receiver of the services (community or individual), the organization itself or characteristics of the volunteer. Thoits and Hewitt argue that “the literature on volunteers has been and continues to be dominated by studies of their sociodemographic characteristics of motivation, attitudes, and values” (117). There is however a growing

body of evidence that the volunteer benefits directly from the act of volunteering and that is best studied by using a more bidirectional lens. The following paragraphs will highlight the impact volunteering has on high school and college-age student volunteers and elderly ones.

The Impact of Volunteering on High School and College Students

Most studies on volunteering typically focus on organizations or older volunteers. There seems to be a relatively recent trend to focus on high school and college students. One of the areas that is studied is the ways in which volunteering helps with civic engagement. The findings indicate that "civic engagement has positive effects on adolescents' development" and also "is a strong predictor of adult volunteerism" (Cemalcilar 435). The extent to which volunteerism increases resilience and gratitude is a bit more ambiguous. There exists a Gratitude Questionnaire and Brief Resilience Scale to measure such questions. As one team of researchers published, "we do not yet know whether volunteerism enhances students' sense of resilience in the face of challenges and or their sense of gratitude from the volunteering experience" (Llenares et al. 211). What this same team of researchers did conclude in their article is that "students with volunteering experience have a higher sense of civic responsibility and achieve well in their studies from applying their field experiences to their academic work (211). One often overlooked impact is that "it fosters a belief in the individual that he or she can make a difference" (Wilson and Musick 154). This belief is regarded as personal efficacy and is a powerful tool that students of all ages can benefit from. Thus, volunteering

clearly has a very positive influence directly on these young students who can eventually apply what they have learned.

The debate about gratitude and resilience is a fascinating one and that could benefit from more research and longitudinal studies. The important thing to remember is that volunteering is something that people choose to do. Yes, there are times that volunteering a young student's time might be part of a school project or college course but research shows that once a volunteer spends time in the field, there is a good chance that they will volunteer again at a later date. Hopefully, as time goes on, the students who volunteer will develop a sense of gratitude and work on becoming more resilient. Even if they do not develop those two qualities, they will almost definitely have been positively impacted by their experiences as volunteers in many other ways.

Older Adults and Retirees as Volunteers

One of the most talked about and researched groups that act as volunteers is older adults. Often, they are linked with retirees in the research studies. There seems to be a strong correlation between this population's level of volunteerism and beneficial results for both the volunteers and the recipients of their time. In particular, the elderly and retirees gain positive outcomes in their well-being. Professor Nancy Morrow-Howell, a leading researcher in the field of gerontology, has contributed to this area of inquiry and her research has drawn such links. There is a debate in this field of inquiry about the "causal links between volunteering and improved health outcomes" (Morrow-Howell et al. 144). What is not in question is about whether or not volunteering is beneficial to

older adults and retirees. In an article that Howell, Hong and Tang published in *The Gerontologist*, they mentioned "spillover effects" (100). These "spillover effects" are aspects of volunteering that pass from the adult volunteer to their immediate families. Such examples are knowing that your adult and retired family member is engaged in the community or keeping their mind sharp by spending time helping others. That same article listed two other important ways that volunteers and their families are affected. One way is that both parties gained knowledge about information and resources and a second way is that they gained better awareness about issues facing society (96).

Conclusion

The evidence is quite clear that volunteering is obviously beneficial to all parties involved. Whether it be the volunteer themself or the recipient of services, volunteering is helpful. Moreover, both anecdotal and empirical evidence easily prove that the act of volunteering is helpful to the volunteer. In other words, volunteering helps the doer. Although there might be some debate as to some very specific aspects of volunteerism and their direct link, there is no debate that volunteering one's time is a productive use of free time. The research done by medical establishments, gerontologists and psychologists clearly show such a positive and productive relationship. In the next chapter on case studies in New Jersey, the volunteers offer oral history via the use of interviews to demonstrate just how similar their experiences are to this chapter's overview of the benefits of volunteering. By offering a different lens to see engagement, that is bidirectional or reflexive in nature, the reader can learn how the stakeholders/volunteers

benefited greatly from their experiences and learned just as much from the community and people they helped as the community learned from the volunteers. In essence, that is the beauty of successful volunteering and engagement. In summary, it is mutually beneficial for all parties involved and can be quite rewarding!

Chapter IV

Case Study #1- Morris County Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Resettlement Community

Introduction

This chapter will address the perceptions of stakeholders (volunteers) based in Morris County, New Jersey about the resettlement community in both Morris and Union counties. These stakeholders represent two organizations in the county that interact directly with recently arrived refugees and offer insight into the daily lives and both the strengths and struggles that their new neighbors face. The stakeholders are an invaluable resource because they choose to volunteer their time to help some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community to begin their new lives in Morris and Union counties and have often been impacted in a positive way by these interactions with the resettlement community. These experiences are largely bidirectional/reciprocal and help to reshape the perception of refugees and offer a counternarrative to the often negative and stereotypical view of the resettlement community that exists. By allowing the stakeholders to talk about their experiences with refugees and demonstrating how positive and constructive such experiences are, society can have an opportunity to rethink any prejudices and unfounded fears they might have about resettled refugees who now call Morris County, Union County and New Jersey home.

Methodology

The methodology utilized in this study involved a semi-structured interview of fourteen heterogenous adult stakeholders that ranged in age from eighteen to approximately eighty. The stakeholders were chosen from two organizations that are

based in Morris County and have a direct relationship with the resettlement community in either Morris County any other county in New Jersey. The sole criterion for participation was that each was a grassroot organization based in Morris County, New Jersey. The organizations could service and support the resettlement community either in Morris County or any of the other twenty counties in the state. The two organizations chosen were Drew University and Refugee Assistance Morris Partners (RAMP), and the interviews were conducted over a span of approximately five months. The selection process for each group was quite simple. For Drew University, the professor put me in contact with former students who volunteered in one of his previous projects with the resettlement community in New Jersey prior to the spring of 2019. I, as his graduate assistant and intern during the spring semester of 2019, reached out to the students who spent a semester enrolled in his course at the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Four of the ten students responded and agreed to be interviewed. However, a fifth student expressed interest in being interviewed but was unfortunately unable to meet. Stakeholders from RAMP were initially chosen by the founders of the organization and then they both put me in contact with other people that were either around or available to be interviewed. The first interview of these fourteen stakeholders was conducted in August 2019 and the final one was in January 2020. The interviews were conducted in one of three ways: on the campus of Drew University in Morris County, New Jersey, at the home of stakeholders in Morris County, or by phone. The stakeholders were extremely generous with their time and often put me in contact with other people to interview from their organization. The following is a list of the questions they were asked:

1. For how long, and in what capacity, did you interact with the refugee/resettlement community?
2. What are the different narratives surrounding the refugee/resettlement community in our country? Which narrative do you subscribe to or where do you stand on that spectrum?
3. How did your experiences interacting with the community impact or change you?
4. What words would you use to describe the individuals you met and interacted with?
5. When you reflect on this experience, do you believe that the clients (refugees) learned more from you, or that you learned more from them? Please specify how.
6. How do you think things would be different if more Americans were able to get to know and spend time engaging our new neighbors on an individual basis?
7. Finally, after having spent time directly with the resettlement community, do you intend to stay involved in this general project of refugee/resettlement assistance and interaction?

Before discussing and analyzing the questions and answers each stakeholder contributed, a brief discussion of each organization would be helpful to gain a better insight into the case study. The Drew University students were divided into two groups.

The first group was from the students who participated in a course on *Refugees and Resettlement* offered at the university in the spring of 2019. The course had a lecture and discussion format on Tuesdays and then a practicum at the IRC on Thursdays. The purpose of the practicum was for the college students to support the clients that ranged from elementary to high school (the term used by the IRC for the students) with homework help and then develop lessons on social and emotional learning that they

themselves implemented under the supervision of the professor and intern. The other group of Drew students in this study participated in an ESL program with the same professor the year before and was held at a church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. In total, there were four stakeholders interviewed from the course and five from the previous experience.

The stakeholders (volunteers) from the other organization interviewed were from RAMP. This is an organization founded in 2015 in Morris County that mostly works with the resettlement community in their own community, and that occasionally collaborates with organizations outside of the county. Unlike the Drew University students, most of the volunteers are retirees with more time to dedicate to the resettlement community. I was able to interview five members of the organization and they often encouraged me to interview people that they knew that were either previous members or people who are no longer part of RAMP but support refugees and immigrants, inside and outside of the county.

The Significance of New Jersey

New Jersey is a good test case because of its geographic proximity to New York City and its diversity of people and cultures. According to 2020 US Census Data, New Jersey is the seventh most diverse state in the nation (Jensen, Jones, Rabe et.al., 2021). In fact, New Jersey has resettled over 8,000 refugees since 2002 *(New Jersey Honors Refugees*) and marks June 20 as World Refugee Day in the state. The county of Morris has started to resettle refugees in some of its thirty-nine municipalities and continues to

offer refuge, on a relatively small scale, to recently resettled refugees. Information gleamed from the *Refugees Among Us* website indicates that 10 refugees have been resettled in Morristown, the government county seat, 8 in Parsippany and 1 in Randolph since 2002 (New Jersey). These three municipalities do not represent all towns and cities in the county but demonstrate that the overall numbers are small but that the county does have a resettlement community and that the state is trying to accommodate refugees in the county. Moreover, the New Jersey Office for Refugees and the New Jersey Department of Human Services created World Refugee day in the state to highlight "the strengths and contributions refugees bring to New Jersey" (NJ Honors) The questions and answers below are from the interviews conducted for this case study and speak directly to the value of diversity, inclusiveness, and a strengths-based approach to refugees that the stakeholders emphasize and understand based on their willingness to engage directly with the resettlement community.

Question #1- For how long, and in what capacity, did you interact with the refugee/resettlement community?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

As mentioned earlier in this case study, the students from Drew University were divided into two distinct groups. The first group (the ones before 2019) have had contact for longer periods of time with the resettlement community and some continue to the present time of these interviews to continue to engage the community. Interviewee #1 started in 2015 as a translator of Arabic, French, and Spanish at the IRC. He then helped

transition students to local schools in Elizabeth, New Jersey and helped enroll them in classes. Interviewee #2 first interacted with the community in 2016 and helped with ESL and worked as a language interpreter for the Afghani community. She began at Drew University's program but then developed an ongoing relationship with RAMP and helps "when they need translators." Interviewee #3 began as an ESL tutor with Drew University in 2018 in the "New Neighbor Project." Interviewee #4 also worked as an ESL tutor with the "New Neighbor Project" and worked exclusively as a tutor for a resettled family. Interviewee #5 started in 2017 as a teacher of adult students before becoming part of the 2018 program at Drew University. He utilized his native Arabic to help as an interpreter. The four other interviewees all began their interaction with the resettlement community in Elizabeth, New Jersey as part of the practicum associated with their course on *Refugees and Resettlement* in 2019.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

I interviewed 5 people from RAMP over a period of one month between December 2019 and January 2020. There were two groups of two (both were husband and wife) and a recent widow and the responses they gave varied. For example, Interviewees #1 and #2 (the first couple interviewed) created RAMP in 2016 but mentioned that they first began interacting with immigrant communities when they moved to Madison, New Jersey in 1970. They noted how they helped a family from Vietnam resettle in the community in the 1970s and later established RAMP in 2016 when they saw the horror of bodies washing up on shore in Turkey during the Arab Spring. The second couple, Interviewees #3 and #4, stated that they began working with

refugees in 2016. Their interactions with the resettlement community included acting as English as a Second Language tutors (ESL) and the husband helps coordinate furniture and renting a truck to help the families settle into their new housing. Interviewee #5 is a recent widow who has been with RAMP "since its inception." I first met her at a lunch with a few other members of RAMP and a child of one of the recently resettled families. The interviewee said that we could do a phone interview and we set-up a meeting a week or so later. She has been an ESL tutor for the organization but wanted me to know that she has had a relationship with the immigrant community from her days as a nurse in Newark, New Jersey in the 1970s. Her current interactions with the resettlement community center around the special relationship she has built with one of the Syrian children. Interviewee #5 said that the child "considers her like a grandmother". This is especially noteworthy because the child's Syrian grandmother was killed during the Syrian Civil War that has decimated her country and led to countless refugees and internally displaced persons.

Analysis

The fourteen interviews conducted clearly indicate that the ESL component was a key factor in the interactions between the resettlement community and the stakeholders involved. The Refugee Act of 1980 mandated English language instruction, as well as economic self-sufficiency. All parties involved understood the importance of satisfying the English language requirement and noticed the intrinsic drive many members of the resettlement community had to gain a strong grasp of the English language. The stakeholders at Drew certainly attempted to satisfy the language requirement and the stakeholders at RAMP continue to be able to both offer ESL tutoring. In addition, RAMP

members help in the process of daily living and integration into society by finding housing, jobs and helping them maneuver throughout the system.

Question #2- What are the different narratives surrounding the refugee/resettlement community in our country? Which narrative do you subscribe to or where do you stand on that spectrum?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

The Drew University students had a wide range of opinions based on their experiences directly engaging the resettlement community. Overall, their views were positive and viewed their new neighbors as assets that benefited New Jersey. Two particular opinions that were widespread were the belief that the resettlement community helps to diversify society and that the economy is enhanced because of the new skills they bring. Interviewee #1 believes, based on his experiences directly engaging the community since 2015, that they create jobs. He recalled how one man he helped was a locksmith and had a skill that was in demand in the county. Interviewee #4 compared them to her parents who were immigrants from Italy and Colombia and said that the refugees wanted "opportunity" and a chance for a "good life." Not one said they were a burden to society and many vehemently disliked such a narrative put forth by certain media organizations and political figures. Interviewee #7 stated unequivocally that they are "absolutely not a burden. They are a help and should be treated as such."

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

The responses overall were quite positive and some stakeholders mentioned more than one narrative that they subscribed to. For example, Interviewees #1 and 2 discussed how refugees were both a benefit and moral obligation. The moral obligation mentioned was to "welcome the neighbor." Of the 5 people interviewed, all 5 of them saw refugees as a net benefit to the country. Three specifically mentioned the moral obligation America has to this global refugee crisis and two mentioned that the refugees that they engage have an entrepreneurial spirit that can help revitalize a town or city. Interviewee #5 stated that "We cannot accept all needy, vulnerable people in the world but I think that we can accept more. It is sinful, immoral that the federal government is separating families."

Analysis

The overwhelming opinion gleaned from the responses illustrate quite clearly that the resettlement community is beneficial to the county they live in and to the state as a whole. Most respondents discussed the immediate town and county the resettlement community now calls how, but indirectly discussed the state of New Jersey as a whole. The important takeaways are that welcoming and resettling refugees into a new town and county offers such benefits as the following: diversity, entrepreneurial spirit, and new skills. In addition, the stakeholders from both organizations view things through a moral lens and believe that our country can do even more, in many cases. The fact that only two people interviewed mentioned the moral obligation to welcome their neighbor was a bit

surprising because there is considerable literature that reflects how volunteers, especially religious ones, often cite Biblical references to "welcoming the stranger."

Question #3- How did your experiences interacting with the community impact or change you? In what way?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

Of the nine stakeholders interviewed, all nine of them said the experience was a positive one and two said it had a profound impact on them. Interviewee # 1 said that "it really changed me completely." It showed him the importance of resilience and the importance of how to perceive people who come from different countries. Interviewee # 2 mentioned that seeing the clients facing their struggles and challenges had a "huge impact" on her. Specifically, the experience she said made her less "selfish" and "self-centered." The other seven stakeholders often cited an "eye-opening" experience and a widening of perspective. Interviewee #5 commented that his interactions engaging a Syrian construction worker led him to conclude that customers were often pleased with his skill set and wanted to hire him because of his talent. This he said could lead to "changing minds" about the resettlement community and could possibly have a multiplier effect.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

Of the five stakeholders interviewed, all five had, and continue to have, positive experiences interacting with the resettlement community. Interviewees #1 and 2 are the founders of RAMP and spent a considerable amount of time discussing this specific question with me. Their main point was that "they get to know them as people" and that is something that many Americans do not get to experience. In fact, the husband noted that although he grew up in Brooklyn in the 1950s and 1960s, he had never met a Muslim family and "knew nothing about their sacred book." These experiences at RAMP have helped him become "more aware" and have given him and his wife a lot of satisfaction. The other couple interviewed, Interviewees #3 and #4, had similar positive experiences. The wife recounted how "it's a great experience" helping the community and how it has broadened her horizons. Her husband seconded that notion when he recalled how the interactions have "helped me learn more about their cultures by meeting with families" and particularly helped him discover the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam. Lastly, Interviewee #5 stated emphatically that she has had her "consciousness raised" because of her interactions. She commented that she has "new insights" into the daily struggle of resettlement, and she has learned that we, as Americans, take things for granted that others struggle with when they arrive in a new country. As was mentioned earlier, she has created a special bond with the child of one of the families she previously worked with and has decided to help the young girl have experiences "that middle class Americans have." She does this by taking the girl to museums, school field trips and by paying for these things with her own money. Interviewee #5 stressed to me that she enjoys helping this girl and that it brings her personal happiness to engage with her.

Analysis

This was an important question in the interview process. This question spoke directly to the heart of my dissertation question about the importance of reflexive engagement. In essence, were the stakeholders impacted by their engagement with members of the resettlement community? The answer is yes! The stakeholders helped the resettlement community but the resettlement community directly impacted, often profoundly, the stakeholders themselves. This is evident in their responses to the question posed. The fact that the stakeholders learned cultural aspects and an appreciation for the level of resilience and perspective gained by simply engaging with refugees is undeniable. Instead of unknown names and faces, the stakeholders were able to put a name with a face and humanized each individual.

Question #4- What words would you use to describe the individuals you met and interacted with?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

Eager/motivated to learn= 5
Happy/Kind/Nice= 5
Hard-working= 3
Shy= 2
Smart= 2
Traumatized= 3
Welcoming/treated you like family= 4

These were the words/expressions most often used to describe the resettlement community that the stakeholders at Drew University cited during the interview. Other words that they mentioned were courage, culture shock, forgiving, grateful, impatient and struggling.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

Brave= 2
Grateful=2
Resilient=2

These five stakeholders offered a much more varied set of responses and only overlapped on three separate occasions (see above). Adjectives that they used to describe the resettlement community that they engage included: charming, courageous, entrepreneurial, faith-filled, hard-working, impressive, loving, a sense of humor, and that they often work as a family to achieve and become successful. Interviewees #3 and #4 reminded me that the question really "depended on who you are talking about." This was a subtle way of stressing the individuality of each person they engage with and to not lump everyone into one simple category. Each person and family deserve the right to be seen as the individual that they are and not placed into a category before people get to actually know them and engage with them.

Analysis

This question allowed the stakeholders to express how they felt about their individual experiences working directly with the resettlement community. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and demonstrate how powerful these experiences have been for people who directly engage with our new neighbors. Hopefully, these descriptions can challenge popular media portrayals and descriptions that paint a much more challenging perception of refugees and recently resettled peoples. The logical thing to do is to ask people who work directly with this vulnerable population about what they actually see when refugees are resettled. If and when everyday citizens in America get the opportunity to read such accounts, perhaps the narrative and perceptions surrounding refugees and the resettlement community will be changed indefinitely. These fourteen stakeholders do not represent the entire state of New Jersey, much less the entire country, but do shed light on what they perceive as an accurate reflection of these often brave, eager, happy, hard-working, and, traumatized, refugees that call New Jersey home.

Question #5- When you reflect on this experience, do you believe that the clients (refugees) learned more from you, or that you learned more from them? Please specify how.

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

Of the nine stakeholders interviewed, seven said the learning experience was equal for both sides, and two said that the clients taught the stakeholders more than the

stakeholders taught the clients. One of the two said that "I think that I learned more from them. I wish they could have learned more from me." She said that because she was one of the college students who predated the 2019 course and practicum at the IRC. She specifically believed the language barrier was an obstacle for full access of ESL tutoring. The other stakeholder believes that "In the end, maybe we learned more from them. It is easier to measure to learn how much we learned from them, instead of them from us."

The seven stakeholders who believed the experience was largely reciprocal had a wide range of opinions as to how they came to that conclusion. For example, Interviewee #2 noted that "they might have learned math or history from me, which was helpful to them" but the interactions made the volunteer both more self and socially aware. Interviewee #8 had a somewhat similar take on the experience. This volunteer said that "I think I taught them academically and they taught me culturally." That was a sentiment that was echoed by Interviewee #6. This stakeholder also highlighted that "we learned a lot from them" but they taught this particular stakeholder about forgiving others and having dreams in their new country. Lastly, Interviewee #1 said there "definitely is" a reciprocal relationship and that the clients have aspirations and that it is "impressive" how quickly they adapt to their new space. This stakeholder (Interviewee #1) has been involved with the resettlement community since 2015 and continues to volunteer outside of the university setting to support the resettlement community and was actually the first person interviewed for this study.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

The five RAMP stakeholders had similar, yet divergent, points of view on this question. Interviewee# 5 did not answer the question directly but cited a couple of examples to stress that the experience was beneficial to both sides. This stakeholder stated that spending time with the Syrian girl helped with the grieving process the stakeholder was going through. This stakeholder recalled how one friend said, "she's so lucky to have you." The response she gave back was "I'm lucky to have her, too." It was obvious to me during the interview that Interviewee #5 truly enjoys helping the girl but has also grown from the experience as the volunteer and has made life more fulfilling for both participants. Interviewees #3 and #4 differed on their opinions. As mentioned earlier, this is one of the two couples interviewed at RAMP. The wife said that the experience was mutual because "they are obviously earning from us" but that "we have learned a lot of culture from them." The husband believes that "we did more for them" throughout the process. Particularly, he mentioned rent payments, gifts, insurance, and assistance with finding good doctors. The other couple, Interviewees #1 and #2 founded RAMP and perhaps have a more nuanced answer to the question posed. They said that "we teach them more because they have more to learn." This was a reference to managing a new system and new culture as resettled members of the community in New Jersey. However, the same couple stated that this couple has gained a "better understanding of humanity." The husband discussed how "I've learned more about our country" and "to be thankful for what I have." The wife believes that "I don't know if it is a question of more. We learned what we needed to learn from them." She went on to

say that she learned to be "grateful." In essence, she ended by stating that "They've learned from us, and we learned from them."

Analysis

This question stimulated a lot of good conversation and occasional debate amongst the stakeholders. The vast majority of stakeholders agreed that the experience was beneficial for both sides involved and that sometimes they actually learned more from the resettlement community than the resettlement community learned from them. When this occurred, the learning was usually cultural or offered insight into a better understanding of humanity. In general, there is no doubt that directly engaging the resettlement community in New Jersey was a positive experience for both sides. On a microlevel, this engagement allowed all participants involved to get to know one another as individuals. On a macrolevel, these series of contacts fostered a deeper understanding of humanity and the struggle that refugees and forced migration has on the world.

Question #6- How do you think things would be different if more Americans were able to get to know and spend time engaging our new neighbors on an individual basis?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

All nine of the stakeholders agreed that engaging on an individual basis is very important. Interviewee #7 discussed his hometown in New Jersey and the hesitance, he

perceives, that many residents have to welcoming both refugees and immigrants. The conversation turned to contact with one individual at a time and that sparked an insight that could possibly impact his hometown. The stakeholder explained how "an individual interaction might speak more to a person and might make a bigger impact." In addition, this volunteer believes that if people could "meet these kids" the college students worked with for a semester, that things would change for the better. This notion was emblematic of most of the other stakeholders interviewed. Interviewee #2 wants people to know that through actively engaging the resettlement community that society could see that these clients (students) "are not bad people." Interviewee #5 had a similar point and believes that this engagement allows society to challenge the media portrayal of refugees as terrorists. Other stakeholders stated that these experiences helped humanize the resettlement community and helped people stop fearing "the other." Interviewee #8 put it so eloquently that it is worthy of a direct quote. "If people were to stop fearing the other, their life would be brighter." One way to have a "brighter" life is that they could befriend a member of the resettlement community or collaborate with them to bring new ideas to society- specifically mentioned were possible advances in medication and technology.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

All five of the stakeholders from RAMP generally had a uniform response. All five strongly asserted that society would benefit from getting to know each member of the resettlement community on an individual basis. Interviewees #1 and #2 said that "they would see they are not very different from themselves." Interviewees #3 and #4 stated that "if you get to know people on a personal basis, you see they are just people." The

one caveat added by this couple was that it is not always easy to have the opportunity to actually engage a member of the resettlement community. These two stakeholders have such an opportunity because of RAMP, but not everyone has direct access to such organizations and thus do not get to meet and spend time with their newly resettled neighbors. Finally, Interviewee #5 discussed how this individual contact would shatter stereotypes and would lead to society to become more "open to people" who are different from themselves.

Analysis

The fourteen interviews conducted clearly indicate that individual contact is an essential part of successful engagement. The ability to spend one-on-one time (or in a small group) allows relationships to develop and grants access to a much more profound understanding of the struggles and successes of the resettlement community. These positive interactions could lead to the spread of success stories from one person to the next and possibly help eradicate the stereotypes about refugees that exist. Although this might seem like an arduous task, the results could lead to a multiplier effect and eventually change the narrative that certain media and politicians have created.

Question #7- Finally, after having spent time directly with the resettlement community, do you intend on continuing to stay involved in this general project of refugee/resettlement assistance and interaction?

Drew University Stakeholders' Responses

There was 100% agreement that all stakeholders wanted to remain involved in some manner. The divide was over the way in which they will do so. One way is formal and the other way is a more informal level of involvement. Interviewee #1 is a Ph.D. student who expressed interest in possibly getting a job in this field. This person also has stayed involved since 2015 by helping to organize the Dean Hopper Conference on *Refugees, Citizenship & Belonging: Towards a History of the Present* at Drew University in September 2019. Interviewee # 3 would like to establish progressive policy that supports the community.

The seven other stakeholders plan on remaining part of the conversation in a more informal, yet productive, way. Interviewee #8 intends to obtain a Ph.D. in anthropology but reminded me that advocacy for the refugee and immigrant community will never be forgotten. The interviewee said that "If I ever hear any negative thoughts against refugees, I will say something." This is a sentiment shared by others that were interviewed. Interviewee #9 said that this is an important issue and wants to stay involved by "raising awareness and challenging assumptions." Interviewee #4 had a similar response and mentioned her career path will be different but will be willing to talk about her experiences interacting with community.

RAMP Stakeholders' Responses

The five stakeholders interviewed responded extremely positively to this question and their answers speak for themselves. Interviewees #1 and #2 said quite simply that "this is our life." In fact, they "will never retire" from this mission, even though they did

retire from their previous jobs before creating RAMP. They went on to say that this is their passion and that "we want to do it." The other couple interviewed, #3 and #4, were equally enthusiastic but did mention one concern. On a positive note, they said that there is "no question it has been a positive experience" but it is also a "huge commitment." Interviewee #5 was also unequivocal in her support for RAMP and is in it for the "long haul" with the girl that she helps.

Analysis

Both groups of stakeholders interviewed definitely plan on continuing to participate in some manner to support the refugee and resettlement community. The most obvious question is how? The Drew University students mostly seem to want to be allies and defenders. They will accomplish this by discussing their experiences at the IRC and challenging assumptions and negative media stereotypes. The members of RAMP responded differently to the question because they are all retirees and have much more time to dedicate to refugee and resettlement causes. Either way, through a formal or informal approach, the resettlement community now has fourteen people who they can count on to support and defend them. Hopefully, these fourteen people can influence their friends and neighbors to simply give their new resettlement neighbors a chance and get to know them as individuals and see all the great things they can bring to whatever town or county they choose to reside in.

CHAPTER V

Case Study #2- Perceptions of the Resettlement Community by Stakeholders Based in Union County, New Jersey

Introduction

This case study is concerned with the perceptions stakeholders (volunteers) based in Union County, New Jersey have about the resettlement community they directly engage. Union County houses the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the city of Elizabeth. Both play an important role in the study of refugees and the resettlement of refugees in New Jersey. The IRC is the initial point of contact for many refugee organizations, including the two that the stakeholders represent in this case study, and helps resettle refugees into the bustling and diverse city of Elizabeth. According to a website on refugee resettlement in America, Elizabeth has resettled approximately 2,109 refugees since 2009 (Refugees Among Us). As mentioned in Case Study #1, there have been slightly over 8,000 refugees resettled in the entirety of New Jersey and thus Elizabeth represents almost 25% of all the resettled community. Moreover, Union County borders Essex County which is home to the city of Newark, and Hudson County, which is home to Jersey City-these represent some of the most populated and ethnically diverse cities and are home to a considerable percentage of the resettlement community. According to the website mentioned earlier, there have been 256 refugees resettled in Newark and 391 in Jersey City, respectively since 2002 (Refugees Among Us). In order

to visualize the geographic proximity between Union County and the rest of the counties in New Jersey, please refer to the map below.

Methodology

This case study involves a series of semi-structured interviews with ten heterogenous volunteers from two different refugee organizations based in Union County. The sole criterion was that each was a grassroots organization based in any of the town or cities in Union County. Both organizations work with students that ranged from K-12 to people well into adulthood. The two organizations were Refugee Assistance Partners (RAP) and the Westfield Fun Club. I was able to interview six volunteers from RAP and four volunteers from the Westfield Fun Club from January to the end of March 2020. The volunteers interviewed from the Westfield Fun Club were chosen by one of the founders of the organization, and the volunteers interviewed from RAP were selected by the organization's president. The same seven questions from Case Study #1 were utilized for these interviews. The only slight difference was that the interviews were conducted in two ways: in person at one of the sites, or on the phone. Just as in the previous case study, all the volunteers and organizations were extremely generous with their time and were more than willing to meet outside of regular hours that the classes met. In fact, the president of RAP emailed me and expressed how happy the volunteers were to be interviewed about their experiences interacting directly with the resettlement community.

Brief Overview of the Organizations

During the interview process, I was fortunate to speak directly with the founders of the Westfield Fun Club and the current president of RAP. All three of these people

gave me a brief history of each organization. Although the organizations are not the core of this dissertation, it seems logical that the reader might want to get just a general understanding of each organization and the volunteers that help them thrive.

The Westfield Fun Club is located out of a temple in Union County. This is significant because the organization was created, according to the founders, to satisfy a bar mitzvah project for one of their sons. The founder spoke with the rabbi and thus a space was given at the temple to start the program in 2016-2017. From that basic proposition, the group has grown and has been able to help many of the new neighbors in Union County. Of possible equal importance is that this program is able to bring the two founders, who share many political opinions but also disagree about others, to collaborate. This is a point that Kate Rice discusses in her book, *How the Refugee Crisis Unites Americans: The Untold Story of the Grassroots Movement Shattering our Red and Blue States*. Although politics is certainly not the point of the group, people from differing political groups can come together for common ground. One grassroots organizer in the book states that "we don't get pulled down into politics. We stand up for human rights" (37). This is exactly what Westfield does, stand up for the human rights of the resettlement community they support. Their program does this by having differing points of view and then, regardless of political affiliation, offers English classes on most Saturdays throughout the year and has expanded to help with transportation and food distribution to families that attend. The volunteers that work there vary week-to week-but range in age from teenagers to retirees.

RAP is an organization that was formed around 2015. I spoke with the current president and she stated that it was founded by three people, one of which continues to

work as a volunteer with RAP. When I conducted my interviews and later became a participant-observer myself over a period of a few months, the classes were held at a church in one of the towns in Union County. Although I did not take demographic information, the volunteers seemed to mimic the age range found in the Westfield Fun Club. RAP was also similar in that it provided English classes, food distribution, transportation services and general help for the resettlement community they interact with.

With the background information of each refugee organization in place and the significance of Union County, specifically the city of Elizabeth described, the next stage is to hear the words of the stakeholders (volunteers) who actually engage the resettlement community on a weekly basis. The following pages allow the reader to get a much fuller understanding of all the great qualities the resettlement community has to offer and the ways in which, through active engagement, the stakeholders demonstrate how the experience has been a powerful and fulfilling part of their lives as volunteers.

Question #1- For how long, and in what capacity, did you interact with the refugee/resettlement community?

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

Of the six volunteers interviewed, two began in 2015, two in 2019 and the others in 2016 and 2018, respectively. Interviewee# 6 is one of the founders of the organization and Interviewee #1, the current president, stressed how RAP is "something grassroots for our community." The most common response the volunteers offered as to their current

capacity at RAP was as an ESL tutor but two volunteers mentioned that they do "whatever needs to be done." By that response they meant driving students to run errands, delivering food parcels to the homes of the resettlement community members, or preparing food for classes.

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

Of the four volunteers interviewed, three started in 2016 and the other has been helping with Westfield for two years. Interviewees #1 and #2 are the founders of the organization and help in all aspects of organization, supplies and pedagogy. They discussed during the interview, just as did the founders of both RAP and RAMP, how the horrific image of a 3-year-old Syrian child washing-up on the shore of Turkey greatly impacted them (see image below). They went on to note that their interactions with the resettlement community have led to a "domino effect" in a positive way. By this they were referring to the creation of an art club and music component that has developed as part of the program. Interviewee #4 is a high school senior whose father asked me to interview her. She has been a tutor with Westfield for two years and has even created a similar program at her high school. In fact, one of her principals has recently joined Westfield as a volunteer.

Analysis

The majority of the volunteers have been working with the resettlement community for less than five years but that is only because these organizations did not exist in Union County, New Jersey before 2015. The volunteers interviewed expressed a strong desire to help and the idea of a "domino effect" that Interviewees #1 and #2 from the Westfield Fun Club seems real. The fact that the arts and music, plus the growth of a spinoff program at the local high school, attest to the passion of the volunteers and reaction by certain members in the local community to expand outreach to the refugees resettled in the county.

Question #2- What are the different narratives surrounding the refugee/resettlement community in our country? Which narrative do you subscribe to or where do you stand on that spectrum?

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

All six stakeholders subscribe to the narrative that refugees are beneficial to society and two made the analogy of belonging to one world family. Interviewee #1 said that the "more I get to know refugee families, the more I realize we have one family." Specifically, Interviewee #4 stressed that, based on her experiences, many students she works with are "very educated" and they have so much to teach us. Interviewee #5 agreed and furthered the point by discussing new skills the students bring, such as artistic talent and a different perspective. The motto of RAP seems to best summarize the narrative that all six stakeholders agree with- "We Choose Welcome." This motto is inclusive and strengths-based and speaks directly to the narrative of a beneficial gain that the resettlement community offers Union County and the citizens of New Jersey.

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

Of the four stakeholders interviewed, two mentioned the moral and religious obligation they felt to help. As previously noted, Interviewees #1 and #2 were interviewed together and often answered collectively. With respect to the question about narrative they referenced the Hebrew Bible and the call to "Welcome the stranger in our land." They went on to recount how this religious refrain is personally important to them but how their organization is a non-religious and that they do not celebrate religious

holidays during classes. The other two people interviewed did not specifically mention a certain narrative by name but certainly expressed their opinions. Interviewee #4 said that helping was the important thing to do. “I have all the resources I need so I can help them. I like helping people improve their lives.” Interviewee #3 discussed how America, at the time of this interview, had record unemployment and that the country could help them get an education and create opportunities.

Analysis

There is no evidence that any of the stakeholders from both organizations saw the resettlement community in a negative light or as a burden to American society. In fact, the anecdotal evidence both groups provided makes it clear that, based on fieldwork and conversations with the students they engage, that the resettlement community is a net benefit to society. Moreover, the talents and perspectives one can learn from the students can help society grow and potentially create opportunities for all parties involved in the county.

Question #3- How did your experiences interacting with the community impact or change you? In what way?

Stakeholders’ Responses from RAP

There was not one pattern that can be deciphered from this question. Each stakeholder had a unique take on the question. However, the one response that they do

have in common is that it has been a positive experience. Interviewee #5 finds the experience so rewarding that she started a club to help refugees based at her neighboring high school in Union County. Interviewee # 3 recounted how her time at RAP has been a "family endeavor." Two of her children often accompany her to the classes and her daughter has had such a great experience as a tutor that she would like to become a teacher in the future. In addition, Interviewee #3 stated that it is "heartwarming to see the successes" many students have made. Interviewee #1 goes even a step further by calling this a "life-changing" experience for her as a volunteer and that the contact she has with the students make "all of my problems seem so small." Interviewee #4 had a similar response and said that this type of engagement has made her a better person because she is more patient and she has learned about the refugee crisis in Syria directly by the Syrian students she helps at RAP. Lastly, Interviewee #2 talked about how the students at RAP are "incredible strivers," in spite of often having to work many jobs to become economically self-sufficient and yet still find time to dedicate to improve their English language skills and attend class.

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

All four of these stakeholders mentioned how these experiences have shown them different perspectives on refugees and immigration. Interviewee # 3 stated how these Saturday morning classes have helped develop a more nuanced view of immigration. Interviewee #3 stated that these experiences have "definitely changed a lot about me." One particular change revolves around contact with friends outside of the Westfield Fun Club. The interviewee recalled how "My friends say I always talk about the refugee kids"

and that "I think a lot less about myself." The founders of the organization, Interviewees #1 and #2, delved into the importance of engagement and that people often have a fear of interacting with unknown groups of people. They offered a solution by posing a question and bit of advice. "How can you say they're a threat when you never met them?" The advice they offer is "Do not judge anyone until you meet them" and to recognize the level of bravery it takes for a woman to pack-up everything and leave their home country. In essence, the experiences these two stakeholders have had helped humanize people and the struggles they face and has made the stakeholders happy to help and led to enjoyment with "Our Saturday morning family" at RAP.

Analysis

The interviews of these ten stakeholders demonstrates how powerful engaging the resettlement community can be. Simply by getting to know students of all different ages, nationalities, and religions, these stakeholders have been able to grow as people and develop an appreciation and respect for the hard-work and effort the resettlement community has put forth since they have arrived in Union County. The notion of humanizing and defending some of the most traumatized and vulnerable peoples in the world cannot be overlooked. The stakeholders have experienced things directly that they can, and do, share with friends, neighbors and members of their local town or city and clearly demonstrate that the impact the resettlement community has had on them is often beneficial and rewarding for everyone involved. The relationships developed are often bidirectional and the stakeholders learn from the resettlement community on a consistent basis.

Question #4- What words would you use to describe the individuals you met and interacted with?

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

Determined/resilient/tenacious= 3 times
Kind/friendly= 2 times
Loving= 2 times
Words used 1 time include the following: challenged, eager, family oriented, hopeful, inspirational, never tired, open-minded, striving and thoughtful

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

There is no chart or box for the answers given by the Westfield Fun Club because there were no overlapping words and the responses given were very different than those of RAP. If there was one answer that was repeated it is that perhaps there is no one word to describe the individuals the volunteers help. Interviewees #3 and 4 (a father and daughter) were interviewed separately but had the same general response**.** They both pushed back on the question and stated that there is no general word or that there is no one word to describe everyone they engage with. The founders of Westfield, Interviewees #1 and #2, had a long list of words that included: courageous, fun/silly, generous, loving, scared/reserved and timid. They went on to qualify "scared" and "timid" by stating that these words applied at the beginning of initial interactions but lessened over time.

Analysis

The responses given by both groups of stakeholders accentuated all of the positive qualities that they see from the resettlement community on a weekly basis. These responses often are overlooked by media and politicians that do not actually talk with the people who directly engage the resettlement community. If they did talk with some of these stakeholders from either organization, they would learn to see the refugees through a different lens. Based on these interviews and experiences, the eyes of the people who have gotten to know and appreciate the resettlement community through direct engagement are often overlooked or barely represented. These interviews with RAP and the Westfield Fun Club hopefully will shed some light on our new neighbors and offer a voice for the voiceless. As the stakeholders have said in their own words throughout the case study, the students they help are challenged, determined, friendly, kind, and yes, inspirational.

Question #5- When you reflect on this experience, do you believe the clients (refugees) learned more from you, or that you learned more from them? Please specify how.

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

Of the six stakeholders interviewed, two considered the learning to be equal for both parties involved, one said that she as a volunteer learned more, and three others answered the question in a less direct way. Interviewee #2 said "I'm learning more from

them because the range of experiences I have with them is wide." Also, this stakeholder said learning to see with "new eyes" has been noteworthy. Of the two stakeholders who considered the learning experience to be equal for both sides, both mentioned that the volunteers help with academics and the students help their tutors learn about culture, especially of the Arab and Muslim world. The other three interviewees had a different approach to the question. For example, Interviewee #6 said that this was a "tough question" to answer. The interviewee said "I don't know factually what they've learned from us. What they get from us is acceptance and care." Lastly, Interviewee #1 chose not to answer directly the question but did respond by discussing what happens when the stakeholders and resettlement community meet. She called it a "different type of learning" because the tutors convey information and "we learn cultural enlightenment."

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

Two of these stakeholders interviewed expressed that the resettlement students they work with learn more from them then they as tutors learn from the resettlement community. Interviewee #3 said that "they learn a lot more from us." However, this did not mean that learning was only one-sided. This same interviewee said "I'm learning a lot" but stressed the nature of giving back to society by volunteering. Interviewee #4 had a slightly different take on the question. This volunteer said "I hope I'm helping them more than they help me" but did mention how important the experience has been. This volunteer called this a "life-changing" experience that is not easily measurable but now knows that working with students "who don't get the support they need" is the career path she would like to pursue in the future. Interviewees #1 and #2 considered this

experience to be reciprocal and noted how "people are people" and that one family tells another family about the experience and then other families want to meet the volunteers. Both interviewees highlighted that it made them very happy when they hear the students express fondness by stating "We love the Jews." They were referring to the fact that the classes are held at a temple in Union County and some of the volunteers are Jewish. This expression of interfaith dialogue and appreciation is not lost on both of these two interviewees and possibly has even greater significance because they are the founders of the organization.

Analysis

The answers to this question were fairly uniform across both organizations. In general, the stakeholders involved felt that learning was taking place on both sides of the table. The stakeholders helped with academics and daily living, while the resettlement community helped foster a better understanding of culture. The idea that "People are People" is something that the stakeholders seemed to have learned and often are willing to share with others. The simple act of engagement allows them the opportunity to share with the greater Union County community the people and faces they help and cultural information that could lead to more informed conversations about the refugee crisis in the world. The interfaith component of this engagement seems to offer a wide range of possibilities and allows different faith communities to learn from each other and interact in a positive way. Based on what the two founders of the Westfield Fun Club stated during the interview, one family telling another family and so on quickly multiples the

number of people who can be impacted in a positive way and hopefully leads to the multiplier effect mentioned throughout both case studies.

Question #6- How do you think things would be different if more Americans were able to get to know and spend time engaging our new neighbors on an individual basis?

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

All six stakeholders were universally supportive of the beneficial nature of getting to know each refugee on an individual basis. The responses ranged from it being difficult to hate who you know personally, to a kinder more caring American population, to the collective heart of compassion of society will burst open. Three stakeholders directly stated that people would realize that the students from the resettlement community are just like the volunteers they engage. Interviewee #1 stated eloquently that they are "just regular people. They may speak a different language and come from a different place, but the human condition is the same." This same interviewee stated that there are "so many myths and misunderstandings" that exist and this form of engagement with the resettlement community allows a way to get the word out about the human condition and address negative perceptions. This same stakeholder offered advice to society at large- "If people met refugees and got a chance to work one-on-one they would notice similarities, not differences."

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

The four stakeholders interviewed from the Westfield Fun Club believed strongly in engagement and think that American society would see refugees differently by simply spending time with them and learning from these interactions. Interviewee #3 recommended that the "single most important thing is to encourage people in the community (non-refugees) to get out and talk to people." With such conversations the narrative could be changed and perceptions altered. Interviewee #4 echoed a similar refrain that other volunteers voiced but with a slight modification. "You can't fear someone you know as a human." Lastly, Interviewees #1 and #2 just want society to see the interactions between volunteers and students at their site. "If you would just get to see what we do, I believe you can change even the most tone deaf" critics.

Analysis

When a person has a chance to spend time one-on-one working with members of the resettlement community, this is often the beginning of an attempt to humanize the millions of faceless and unknown refugees on television. Perhaps this humanization of the resettlement community is the biggest takeaway from the ten interviews conducted of the stakeholders based in Union County. The ability to talk with, laugh with, and share a meal during a tutoring session is something that many of the stakeholders have mentioned in different ways. At the end of the day, it is simply the act of engaging the resettlement community that the stakeholders desire for the public to learn about. In addition, the volunteers seem to enjoy having the chance to share what they learned with others during these weekly tutoring sessions and help with daily living that the volunteers

believe will challenge perceptions of the resettlement community that are often founded in misinformation and fear.

Question #7- Finally, after having spent time directly with the resettlement community, do you intend on continuing to stay involved in this general project of refugee/resettlement assistance and interaction?

Stakeholders' Responses from RAP

The six volunteers interviewed were emphatic in their desire to remain part of the general project of refugee/resettlement assistance and interaction. The range of answers varied from making donations, to becoming an immigration lawyer, to help growing RAP, and by finding one day a week to continue to support the community. Interviewee #6 plans on retiring from her job at a local school district and moving to the Carolinas but insisted that she will continue outreach to the Latin American community in her new state. Interviewee #1 stated that this commitment is "for as long as I am able." Some volunteers have mentioned earlier during the interview process that this level of engagement is rewarding but is also time consuming and that is always a consideration.

Stakeholders' Responses from the Westfield Fun Club

Just as in the case of RAP, the volunteers at the Westfield Fun Club all would like to continue working with the refugee and resettlement community. Interviewee #3 discussed how he wants to help grow the organization and to refurbish the laptops that

the students use at the site. Interviewee #4 stated the following: “I have this global issue I care about and I will look for more opportunities to help with whatever the community needs.” Interviewees #1 and #2, the founders of the organization, mentioned how they have already expanded the program to three or four Saturdays a month for two hours each time and that reflects their level of commitment to the cause.

Analysis

The overall reaction to this question was positive. All of the ten stakeholders seem genuinely committed to help their new neighbors succeed and they presented different ways to remain involved in the refugee and resettlement conversation. Although they may be directly or indirectly involved, there is no doubt that they will remain stakeholders in the well-being of the community and advocates to champion their cause and more than willing to challenge anyone who offers an opinion simply based on fear and prejudice towards the refugee and resettlement community, both in Union County, New Jersey and the wider world. The experiences these stakeholders gained by volunteering their time have given them insight into a much larger struggle to resettle the countless millions of people just trying to survive and feed their family. The different ways the stakeholders plan on staying engaged with the community could offer different tools in the toolkit to support and defend the growing number of refugees and recently resettled families and individuals that will surely continue to increase over time.

CHAPTER VI

Applications of this Study

This chapter is largely written for both educators at the secondary level and above and practitioners in the field who engage refugee students and the resettlement community. This targeted audience comprises the stakeholders who have a vested interest in the well-being of society, and in turn, the refugee students that now are part of the resettlement community throughout school districts and municipalities in America. The purpose of this chapter is to genuinely engage the public in a conversation about the resettlement community. This chapter is relevant because it seeks to highlight all the good our new neighbors have to offer society and ways to foster a better understanding of what they bring to their new communities and schools.

Before this chapter begins to develop any further, I think that I need to disclose that I am a high school social studies and foreign language teacher in New York State with more than two decades of experience. I mention that because ever since I began researching refugees and the resettlement community, specifically the idea of reflexive engagement and volunteers, I have come across many questions and have had many interesting conversations with different people in the community in which I live and teachers that I interact with. These questions and conversations have generally centered around some pretty basic and fundamental ideas that my study addresses. Probably the most common question I am faced with is the working definition of a refugee. A second question usually revolves around how to engage with students and adults who come from

refugee backgrounds. A third question typically involves perceptions about refugees and the resettlement community. Essentially, those conversations with my fellow teachers and staff, in and out of the high school environment, is how this chapter evolved over time. My strongest desire is for their questions to be answered, for tools to be added to their pedagogical toolkit, and for a strengths-based approach towards the resettlement community to be developed.

There is no question that the resettlement community comprises our "new neighbors" and thus involves students in both K-12 classrooms and adult education programs. Hopefully questions and concerns from members of the non-resettlement community will be addressed and we can continue to reach all of our students that enter the classroom and, by doing so, offer a counternarrative that allows refugee students that are now part of the resettlement community to be viewed in a different light. These are obviously big and important ideals to strive towards but the important thing is that the evidence and experiences are, at least from my research and interactions with stakeholders, overwhelmingly positive and demonstrate that these students and recent additions to our local towns and counties have qualities and skills that could very much benefit the school community and offer a counternarrative that might greatly change perceptions within the greater community. The most important thing is that society gets to engage directly with the resettlement community and then can decide for themselves about just what and how our new neighbors and students have to contribute to our society and local areas where they live.

The education section will be divided into four parts. The first part will delve into "What Teachers Can Learn from Refugee Legislation." The second section is dedicated

to the "Uniqueness of a Refugee Student" and discusses a wide range of issues that impact refugee students, inside and outside of the school day. The third section of the chapter will be used for pedagogical purposes and is titled "Strategies to Engage the Learner." Part Four discusses "School-Wide Tools to Help Refugee Students." Separate from the discussion on education in this chapter is a final section that offers a counternarrative and presents an image of refugee students and the resettlement community that incorporates a strengths-based approach that challenges stereotypical and negative perceptions that have permeated the news over the past four years of the Trump administration and previous gubernatorial administration of Chris Christie in New Jersey.

What Teachers Can Learn from Refugee Legislation

Education is a fundamental part of the life experience and is a right expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Refugees have been resettled in all of the fifty states in our country and are part of society and our nation's school systems. Unfortunately, people often tend to lump all students together and forget what makes students unique. This section will address an often forgotten, understudied and underrepresented group of students in the United States, the refugees.

Before we precede and take a deeper dive into refugees, there needs to be a working definition of the term. In fact, terminology associated with this field of study is a primary principle that educators should learn. The best place to turn is to the United Nations and the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the part of the UN that helps protect and assist

refugees around the world. Although the definition of "refugee" varies slightly around the world, the UNHCR has a working definition of refugee that is generally universally accepted that dates back to the 1951 Convention. Although this term was explained in a previous chapter, its importance cannot be overlooked, nor forgotten. Thus, according to the UNHCR, a refugee is someone:

> "owing to 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, or; who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Convention).

A second principle that teachers can learn from refugee legislation, specifically the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, is the concept of non-refoulement. As explained in both the Glossary of Terms and Chapter 2, non-refoulement means that refugees cannot be forced to return to their country of origin. In all likelihood, the recently arrived refugees are here to stay and are now part of the American mosaic. This does not preclude a possible secondary internal migration after a certain period of time, but that is something that non-refoulement neither addresses nor does it prohibit. A secondary migration is a personal choice by every person but does speak to the desire for recently resettled refugees to continue to pursue their dreams and live where they want. Although that is a fascinating area of study and deserves much more

attention and research, secondary migration is not part of the scope of this dissertation, nor part of the legal right of non-refoulement. This legal right of non-refoulement is an important concept for teachers to discuss with their students and could possibly lead to very interesting conversations between the teacher and students, and more importantly, between the students themselves. The ability for the learners in the classroom to engage in an active dialogue about what a refugee is and what rights and international protections they are offered is an invaluable opportunity that all parties could benefit from. This conversation could also continue to include the 1967 Protocol.

A summary of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees gives the teacher an opportunity to learn about the geographic limitations of the 1951 Convention. Moreover, the Protocol allows the teacher to gain a better insight into the blatant Eurocentric bias in the previous refugee legislation and leads easily into a much broader conversation about the Civil Rights Movement and the 1965 Immigration Legislation enacted by President Lydon Johnson.

Another set of invaluable tools that educators can learn from is the section on "Refugee Legislation Since 1945" and the UNHCR's website and section "Frequently Asked Questions." That question section presents key questions that students might have and clarifies rules and basic ideas about refugees and immigration. On that page the UNHCR distinguishes between refugees, asylees, and migrants and that information will help students and teachers have a much more informed and nuanced conversation. In general, asylees and refugees are essentially the same, with one obvious but important distinction. An asylee has already entered their new country and asks permission to stay. A refugee is invited into their new country from abroad. In essence, it is the location

from which the person is currently in that determines whether they are an asylee or refugee. This dissertation will discuss refugees, but many sources consulted, especially ones in more popular and less academic publications, often use the terms interchangeably. Based on an understanding and reading of the appropriate legislation in the field, both teachers and students can learn from these primary and secondary sources. This dissertation, and both this chapter and Chapter 2, allow the reader to learn the nuances between the terms and to use both words appropriately. Although both asylees and refugees are worthy of study and often go underrepresented in school-wide discussions, this dissertation will focus specifically on refugee students as members of the resettlement community in and out of the school environment.

The Uniqueness of Refugee Students

Refugee students are more common than people might imagine. In "A Timely Opportunity for Change: Increasing Refugee Parental Involvement in U.S. Schools," the authors discuss the approximate number of refugee students there are in America. Of the 3 million refugees who have resettled in America since 1980, "40% are school-aged children who are enrolled in U.S. schools" (Koyama and Bakuza 2013). The Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services, which collaborates with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, states on their website that 37% of all refugees resettled in 2008 were children and that "together with immigrants, these newcomer children make up one in five children in the U.S." (Schools). In all likelihood these numbers are approximations, but the impact is real. Countless schools across the country have some level of refugee

students and therefore need to understand more about them and learn to appreciate the unique backgrounds and skills they bring to their new school districts.

An obvious way to gain a better understanding of refugee students is to simply read the existing literature. As a current teacher, I can assure the reader that is easier said than done. The life of a teacher is demanding and often unappreciated (by some). In fact, I feel that many people and students do hold their teachers in high esteem and value their insight and passion to help and support the students in the classroom. However, I realize that most teachers do not have the time, and often the resources, to learn more about all of their students, especially the refugee students that are more than likely recent arrivals to the school district. That is why this chapter is so invaluable. I highly recommend to any teacher that they read *The Newcomers: Finding Refuge, Friendship, and Hope in America* by Helen Thorpe and *Refugee High: Coming of Age in America* by Elly Fishman. The former spends time with refugee students and families in Denver and the latter with refugees in Chicago. In addition, there are many interesting academic journals that offer incredible insight and advice about the uniqueness and wonderful qualities that these new members/students of all ages (kindergarten through adult education programs) have to offer and what concerns they bring to the classroom.

One of the most unique aspects of refugee students is the trauma they have seen. The literature often discusses the trauma in broad terms but never dismisses it. Educators should be reminded that refugee students bring an "invisible backpack" to the classroom that should never be forgotten. Recognizing the impact of trauma is important and making sure to not worsen it is essential. In *The Newcomers, Thorpe* discusses and analyzes refugee students in Denver, Colorado. The author mentions trauma they faced

and gives a brief history of their countries of origin and the conflict zones where they lived. However, Thorpe and the teacher from the school make sure not to delve too much into the trauma their students had and continue to face. In one part of the book Thorpe admonishes the reader to "tread lightly in this room" because you don't know exactly what you might hear if the students begin to share too much of their past (152). This is a stark warning that teachers and schools need to remember when they deal with students who have faced such trauma. School professionals should recognize and respect trauma and then leave it to school psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors to offer the appropriate clinical approaches to help minimize and address the needs of the students.

A second unique aspect that refugee students bring to school is interrupted formal instruction. Educators refer to this as students with interrupted formal education or perhaps more commonly as "SIFE." Two researchers who have studied this phenomenon are Brenda Custodio and Judith O'Loughlin. In their book *Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They are and What They Need,* they spend a chapter on refugee students and SIFE. The authors mention that SIFE is not unique to refugees, but they do face it more than most other students. In fact, SIFE is more pronounced in migrant and immigrant students, and refugee students are the "second largest group" (41). However, refugee students have a unique set of life experiences that distinguish them. The authors state that refugee students have "particular difficulties to adjusting to U.S. schools" because of their time in refugee camps, culture shock, and academic rigor (48). This no way means that these students cannot achieve and even thrive, just that the education in refugee "camps" is not always accessible and adequate. The interviews

conducted during the two case studies with teachers reference student success and strong work ethic and motivation to do well in American schools.

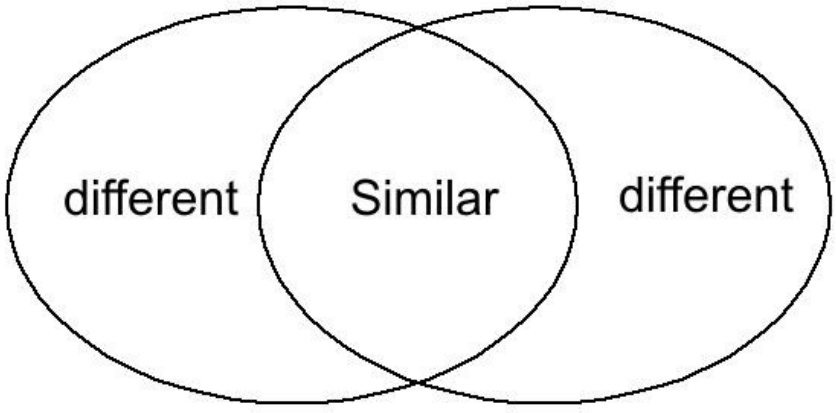
A third unique aspect of refugee students is limited parental contact with school districts. The relationship between schools, parents, and students is very important. All three parties need to work together to form the school community. Schools often pride themselves on relationships between parents and teachers. However, the parents of refugee students often experience frustration and unease dealing with schools. In fact, this is an area of education that is grossly understudied. One research study states clearly that "there exists scant research on refugee parents' involvement with U.S. schools" (Koyama and Bakuza 314). Unfortunately, this is not because of a lack of effort on behalf of the parents but seems to be negligence on the part of school districts.

School districts have a responsibility to meet the needs of all the learners and to accommodate the parents so that they can be active participants in their child's education. Schools have a difficult time interacting with parents who speak Spanish because of a lack of interpreters and translators for meetings. As a high school history and Spanish teacher located in the suburbs of New York, I have been asked to attend countless meetings to act as an interpreter of Spanish. I gladly welcome the opportunity to aid the Latino community and find it rewarding to do so. However, I am often shocked to learn that schools in my county have such a difficult time accommodating parents who simply want the chance to communicate in the language they feel most comfortable using (overwhelmingly in Spanish). So, it is understandable, but not acceptable in my opinion, that districts find it very challenging to find interpreters for speakers of Arabic, Swahili, Dari, etc. Schools must do better and it is paramount that they invest the money to hire

interpreters and translators in order to service all of the parents of all of their students. Students, that includes refugee students as well, need to access the curriculum through interpreters and parents need equal access to understand curricular requirements and extra-curricular opportunities for their children and that is much more easily accomplished by offering communication in their native language.

Strategies to Engage the Learner

One strategy that could be implemented is for the teacher to put the Protocol in a broader conversation about the 1965 Immigration Act and the Civil Rights Era. The lesson might mention President Lyndon Johnson and how "at the bill signing, Johnson talked of civil rights and equality" (Lee 224). Moreover, a comparison could be made between the Immigration Act and the 1967 Protocol that could stimulate some possible historical, cultural, and societal questions and answers along the way. Please see the Venn Diagram as a guide.



The Venn Diagrams foster lots of dialogue in the classroom and make students take the lead in the lesson. Brainstorming things that both acts of legislation have in common opens the door to the possibility of fascinating student-led conversations and even the possibility of further research by the students themselves into specific aspects of refugee rights, legislation and history.

A second approach to a lesson is by using a word bubble to begin the lesson on refugees and the resettlement community. Please see the image below to better visualize the concept.

Within the word bubble the teacher can place the word refugee/resettlement community and ask the students to associate words and ideas with it. I use this all the time as a "Do Now" activity and it often leads to very interesting conversations. The teacher gets to

learn what background information students have about the topic and what questions they need clarified. In fact, the teacher can even have a student lead the exercise, under their supervision, and help further engage the learners. This is an excellent way to introduce a topic, especially one that is contemporary in nature because many of the students in the room have probably already heard about the refugee crises in the world. In my professional opinion, the goal of education should be student-centered and largely student-led and this lesson essentially requires that.

A third approach teachers can use is to read the primary and secondary sources that deal with refugees and have the students discuss and analyze each one of them, either in groups or individually. I recommend the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a starting point for such a unit. This document predates the 1951 Convention and allows the students to read each right and discuss it and why they think it is important. In addition, curricular requirements and state assessments often include interpretation of such primary sources and this lesson will help build historical skills and critical thinking. Hilary Landorf and Martha Fernada Pineda offer sample scenarios, ideas and ways to contextualize the document. They write that "the UDHR is an instrument that can help students anchor the universality of human rights both in their daily lives and in their study of history" (322).

One final, yet often overlooked tool that teachers can use is the power of positivity. The approach that educators bring to the classroom is vitally important to the culture established in the room and with the students. When educators in the school demonstrate a positive attitude, students seem to respond better and reactions by most learners improves. The article "Choosing to be Positive" is a perfect example of such a

teaching approach. The authors write that "research shows that young children who experience warm, trusting teacher-student relationships with low degrees of conflict are more likely to have a positive adjustment to school" (Jones et al 63). Simply put, a few kind words every day, greeting students at the door, thanking them and letting them know that you are there to support, not punish them, makes a world of difference. I see this all the time in school and see amazing results and relationships. Teachers need to be even more mindful of creating a positive environment and demonstrating a nurturing, supportive attitude with our newly arrived refugee students and their parents.

School-Wide Tools to Help Refugee Students

The next part of this chapter will discuss ways in which schools can help their refugee students. In Plyer v. Doe, the Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that "no child may be denied admission to school based on immigration status" (Custodio and O'Loughlin 24). This ruling includes refugee students, and the Supreme Court decision needs to be understood by all parties involved. One needs to remember that refugee students were invited to America and deserve access to an education. Even though people might confuse refugees with asylees, and immigrants, all have a right to an education once they are on American soil.

The first thing that needs to be done to help refugee students is to offer social-emotional learning (SEL). This can be done by either teachers, social workers, or school psychologists. SEL can be taught during academic class or during counseling sessions throughout the day. Either way, the research on SEL is growing and encouraging.

According to one study, "the promotion of SEL skills has been found to be associated with positive outcomes for students. For example, SEL skills have been linked to positive student outcomes, including academic engagement, positive behavioral outcomes, and attachment to school" (Eklund et al. 317). The skills taught in SEL can help the refugee students fill any academic or social gaps that they have. The most crucial thing is that schools provide this service as part of the school day. The research seems compelling and should help drive instruction in the building.

Schools also need to incorporate more mental health counseling into the school day. There is no doubt that refugee students bring trauma that is often unseen by many in the school building. This does not mean that it should go unattended. Schools need to hire more guidance counselors, school psychologists, and social workers to help them process and work through their trauma. There seems to always be this debate in education about whether or not to hire more counselors, or to cut them as part of a school's budget. This is obviously wrong and schools need to invest in counselors to help all of their students succeed, especially the most vulnerable ones of all- the refugees.

Finally, schools and society need to reframe the conversation on refugees. In reality, we are not on opposite sides but need to find commonality and an approach that best serves all of our learners and the greater school community. Instead of focusing on the negative and challenges they have to face, schools need to accentuate the positive and dramatically change how they view refugees. Schools should adopt a strengths-based approach that sees refugee students as contributing to the school environment. In "Route to Refugee Success," the author interviewed school leaders about their views of refugees. One leader put it best when he referred to refugees as "assets who can share their customs

and life experiences" (Zalaznick 30). This approach allows the refugees to contribute to the school environment by linguistic and cultural diversity. These new students are in fact new neighbors that can offer richness to the community, both in and out of school, and help their fellow students better understand and appreciate the world. The world is more connected than ever before and these new students can help their classmates improve language skills, cultural appreciation and cultural competence.

In conclusion, the number of refugee students entering American schools is on the rise. The evidence is clear that their numbers will increase and American schools will continue to become more ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. School districts need to embrace this change and work to better incorporate their new students, plus their parents, into schools across America. These new refugee students have lots to offer and just need a chance to access the curriculum and realize the "American Dream." By offering such an approach, we as educators can offer a counternarrative to the often stereotypical and negative perception some in America have about refugees and the resettlement community.

CONCLUSION

This study of perceptions stakeholders have of the resettlement community located in Morris and Union counties in New Jersey has proven the importance of engagement. On one hand, it is all too common to simply have preconceived notions of what refugees might believe, how they might act, or questions about their desire to work and achieve in New Jersey. On the other hand, it is quite a different experience when volunteers gain a chance to meet, interact, share stories and laughs with the newly arrived refugees who have been recently resettled. These volunteers in turn become stakeholders that want to see their students, neighbors, and at times, friends, succeed in their new country. The two case studies of stakeholders from four different grassroots organizations in New Jersey indicate overwhelmingly that the resettlement community has tremendous potential and is clearly a net benefit. The interview component of the study allowed over twenty different stakeholders to share their perceptions and often challenged stereotypes and preconceived notions that some American citizens have about refugees.

The first-hand experiences of the stakeholders present an image of the resettlement community that directly challenges media representations or sensationalized accounts by people who have never actually met someone who had to flee for their life. The power of engagement is something that cannot be overlooked or overstated. There was a total of 24 interviews conducted from four grassroots organizations in New Jersey. The stakeholders interviewed willingly volunteered and often continue to volunteer their time because they see such hope and optimism with the resettlement community that they choose to spend time with. The interviews and stories that were collected during the data

collecting phase of the dissertation demonstrated the ratio of positive interactions greatly outweighed any negative ones. In fact, almost all of the volunteers interviewed wanted to remain actively engaged in the field of refugee and resettlement. This clearly shows that the volunteers were often impacted by what they experienced and saw that the refugees they helped also helped them as well. Whether this is called reflexivity, bidirectionality or a reciprocal relationship, the evidence from these two case studies demonstrate that the stakeholders benefited heartily from these interactions and often felt a great sense of satisfaction by helping their new neighbors in New Jersey.

Key Takeaways from this Research

I had the pleasure of spending nearly two years researching refugees and the resettlement community in both New Jersey and the nation as a whole. I spent direct time with the resettlement community in New Jersey and countless hours reading as much of the current literature as I could find about the resettlement communities throughout the nation. This was an arduous task but one that I enjoyed immensely. That is why I take great pride in sharing what I think are some key takeaways from this research study. Now that I have spent time doing fieldwork and directly engaging with refugees, volunteers and refugee organizations in New Jersey, I feel as though these key takeaways could be extremely helpful to anyone who would like to study, work with or teach refugees and members of the resettlement community. The following is a list of the key takeaways:

1. Reflexivity is often a better approach than being reflective.
2. The benefits of volunteering are well-documented on both the volunteer and the party that receives such help.
3. The exact number of refugee organizations in New Jersey differs by websites consulted. However, there were at least 4 grassroots organizations based in New Jersey that work with the resettlement community that were discussed in this dissertation and located in Morris and Union counties.
4. This study can act as a counternarrative to challenge negative and hurtful views of refugees from people who probably have never met a refugee before.
5. The chapter on applications can be an invaluable teaching tool for educators.
6. A strengths-based approach model to interactions with students and refugees is one that should be encouraged in academic settings

Each takeaway merits a brief discussion. Reflexivity is a better option when examining interactions because it allows the volunteer to not only think about what they have offered, but also ways in which they themselves have been impacted by the refugees. The benefits of volunteering on the volunteer is a well-documented phenomenon and this dissertation adds to original research in the field. This research on reflexivity allows a much deeper understanding of volunteers and allows the volunteer to analyze areas that these interactions have made their lives better and richer (whether culturally, linguistically, or socially). Instead of thinking about ways that stakeholders helped the community, reflexivity makes one think inward as if they were looking in the mirror and seeing both sides of the engagement.

One obvious way to gain such insight is to volunteer with refugee organizations. Future volunteers or students who are interested in refugee and resettlement studies now are aware of the four grassroots organizations that work directly with the resettlement community in New Jersey. In addition, the reader is aware of the International Rescue Committee in Elizabeth, New Jersey because it was referenced throughout the dissertation. There are two other organizations that are not part of the dissertation but could be useful in the future. These two organizations are One World, One Love and United Tastes of America. When I first had to find such refugee organizations it was a bit difficult, but any future student, volunteer, or researcher can simply read this section to quickly find organizations that might be useful to them. I mention this because a teacher friend of mine contacted me a short time ago because she knew that I was researching refugees. She wanted to invite a refugee or possibly a refugee organization to her school but did not know how to get started. Hopefully, this study will allow anyone to quickly find a refugee organization and thus this dissertation could be a useful resource for educators.

A few other key takeaways from this dissertation are that it gives the reader a very positive and optimistic view of the resettlement community based on first-hand experiences and oral history from the stakeholders involved. That information provided can act as a counternarrative to challenge anyone who attempts to belittle or stereotype refugees. The stakeholders were adamant about defending refugees' rights and wanted people to know that the resettlement community is composed of people who want a chance to succeed and are willing to sacrifice and work hard to live in peace and, just like the parents and ancestors of millions of Americans, the resettlement community wants to

try to achieve success in their new country. The stakeholders humanized the refugees they helped and almost always told how they themselves grew and became better people by what they learned from the refugees they were helping. The stakeholders practiced reflexivity (whether they were familiar with the term or not) and were able, and often continue to, share their experiences with their own neighbors and friends.

Lastly, this dissertation offers practical applications that teachers can use in their classroom and school because all states in the country need to learn how to engage all learners, refugees included, and become more mindful of ways they interact with some of the most vulnerable and traumatized students, the refugees. The strengths-based approach demonstrated throughout the study offers a different way to engage students and people and gives teachers additional tools to add to their toolkit that accentuates the positive and encourages teachers to see all of the good that their newly arrived students have to offer the school.

Limitations of the Study

Arguably the most pressing question is whether these findings can be applicable to the country as a whole. The answer is probably not. The United States is a geographically immense, and culturally diverse nation. Therefore, the best application of this study is to New Jersey and its own unique geography and demographics. Moreover, the sample size of the study is a good starting point for future research and attempts to offer general findings about four different grassroots organizations and the stakeholders within them but should not be considered 100% conclusive. Research offers glimpses

into society but can rarely claim to offer generalizations for an entire country. What this dissertation does allow is for the reader to learn about specific stakeholders in two counties in New Jersey and then possibly compare and contrast these findings with others from different states. Perhaps such an approach will generate findings and areas of discussion that could lead to larger studies that involve a much more extensive sample size.

Concluding Thoughts

I feel blessed and much more culturally and historically aware because of this amazing experience over the past two years of my life. Never in my wildest imagination did I think that this inquiry would be such a life-altering experience. Ever since I began this journey in the office of my professor at Drew University in New Jersey, my life has been on a trajectory with the resettlement community that has fundamentally shaped my life experiences. I have learned to see, not only what I can offer the resettlement community, but all the things that the community has taught me. All-in-all, I have grown tremendously as a person and I would like to thank all the refugees, volunteers, and organizations that have helped direct my research, findings, and have given me such an appreciation for the struggles and commitment by all parties involved. This has been so impactful that I continue to work with the resettlement community and organizations in the area during weekends, and, whenever necessary, advocate for the rights of refugees recently resettled or abroad. The act of engagement is one that everyone should experience and then afterwards apply the practice of reflexive thinking to truly appreciate

how wonderful it is to work with recently resettled refugees. In the end, engagement and reflexivity will show to many that the true changemakers in America might very well be the refugees that yearn for freedom and success in their new homeland!

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Orange County Community College	Middletown, NY	A.A.	1995
SUNY Cortland	Cortland, NY	B.A. in Anthropology	1997
CUNY Lehman	Bronx, NY	M.A. in Secondary Education	2000
CUNY Lehman	Bronx, NY	M.A. in History	2010
Drew University	Madison, New Jersey	Doctor of Letters	2022