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### Refugee resettlement in New Hampshire: pathways and barriers to building community

Nina Glick Schiller, PhD; JerriAnne Boggis; Molly Messenger; Emily M. Douglas, PhD; University of New Hampshire

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# Refugee Resettlement in New Hampshire: Pathways and Barriers to Building Community

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The purpose of this study was to understand the process of refugee resettlement in New Hampshire by learning from recently arrived refugees and members of local communities involved in the resettlement process. The study asked how refugees coped after the eight month period during which they were eligible for certain limited federally funded government assistance.
- The study interviewed 76 refugees and 26 other members of local communities.
- The refugees interviewed were settled by a resettlement agency, which placed them primarily in Concord and Laconia in 2006-2007.
- Refugees are often stereotyped as uneducated and unskilled. The study found that the vast majority (86%) arrived with some schooling and an array of skills. Thirty-eight percent a high school education or higher; 12% had at least a university education.
- Most refugees found the resettlement process rather brutal. The federal policy of resettlement through rapid abandonment means that refugees who have survived war and persecution face conditions that they often found frightening and stressful.
- Refugees were required to take the first job offered, despite having been given little or no English language training.
- At the time of the interview, generally between eight months and two years after arriving, the majority of refugees were employed (78%), spoke some English (67%), were living with other family members (83%), and used a car owned by a member of their household to get to work (60%).
- Social networks were fundamental to refugee resettlement. The refugees interviewed struggled to build a new life by creating a network of community volunteers, neighbors, friends, family, and other newcomers. The refugees in our sample came from 11 countries. Although some ethnic organizing has developed in New Hampshire, refugees have not found the type of community organizations that facilitate resettlement in large urban environments.
- Refugees found support from other refugees and immigrants of diverse backgrounds who were already settled in the community.
- Community volunteers played a central role in refugee resettlement in Concord and Laconia, providing refugees with crucial emotional support, transportation, clothing, furniture, instruction, money, and orientation.
- Employers, police officials, churches, journalists, and public officials in both Concord and Laconia expressed an openness to refugees.
- As low-wage workers and taxpayers, the refugees joined all those in New Hampshire who face costly housing and higher education, inadequate health insurance and public transportation, and few local social services.

- The employment profile of the refugees interviewed highlighted the unheralded presence in the New Hampshire economy of small industrial facilities linked to multi-national corporations. Refugees worked in these industrial workplaces, as well as in service industries from fast foods to health facilities. This employment tended to be low-wage, part-time, seasonal, and subject to lay-offs. Occasionally, however, refugees found opportunities for further education or retraining through these employers.
- Refugees reported instances of workplace-based discrimination. Our accompanying ethnography revealed that refugees and their children faced harassment and the children faced racism from other children in school.
- The study revealed multiple instances of neighborliness and the kindness of strangers.
- Many community members interviewed were concerned with the negative stereotypes of refugees and immigrants as a drain on public services. To combat this misinformation, they emphasized that refugees worked hard and paid taxes.
- New Hampshire residents involved in refugee settlement stressed that refugees—as well as immigrants—serve as role models through their resiliency and courage, as well contributing diverse cultural knowledge to local communities.
- Refugees and the local community members agreed that the federal government should provide more sustained support for refugee resettlement. Short-term grant funded supplemented only by volunteer efforts provide uncoordinated services, which have been wasteful and ineffective.
- The report makes a series of recommendations including replacing the one month resettlement protocol followed by eight months of minimal support with a long-term federally funded support network configuration. This support system should continue to emphasize refugee employment, improved English language instruction, driving instruction, funding and technical assistance for community volunteer networks, public education about US immigration and naturalization policies, free legal assistance for applications for citizenship, and procedures to revalidate the credentials of refugee and immigrant professionals and technicians.
- Refugees draw attention to a broader contradiction that characterizes New Hampshire, namely, although it is a state that boasts one of the highest per capita incomes, New Hampshire provides few social supports, training, or opportunities for its residents.
- The report notes that refugees' needs highlight the broader deficiencies of New Hampshire services and programs. The report calls for increased public transportation, low income passes for public transportation, affordable housing, universal health insurance, increased support for public education and affordable higher education and training.

## Acknowledgements

The research on which this report is based was funded by The James H. Hayes and Claire Short Hayes Professorship of the Humanities at the University of New Hampshire awarded to Nina Glick Schiller and by a Presidential Excellence Award from the University of New Hampshire to Nina Glick Schiller and Emily Douglas. The refugee interviews were conducted and coded primarily by JerriAnne Boggis and the community interviews done by primarily by Molly Messenger. Verina Robiller contributed to the coding and study organization; transcription were done primarily by Emma Duffy-Comparone. Darien Rozentals designed and constructed the tables and charts and contributed to the writing process. Our thanks go to Brienne Langlois, Justin Carr, the many other UNH students, and CORAJ members who gave generously to the tasks of refugee support and ethnography and to Professor Burt Feintuch and the Center for the Humanities for encouragement and support. The analysis and conclusions are solely the responsibilities of the authors.

## Preface

This report was inspired by the generosity of the refugees, immigrants and other community members who shared their time, homes, and ideas with us. It also reflects our conversations with the UNH undergraduates who supplemented the research by serving as research assistants during interviews, as well as providing English tutoring, assistance in family reunion processes, and general social support to refugees in Manchester, Concord, and Laconia. These students testified that community-based learning was an important part, and often *the* most important part, of their education. This student engagement was made possible because of the support for such activity by the James H. Hayes and Claire Short Hayes Professorship, the UNH Department of Anthropology, the Parents Fund, and the Center for the Humanities, to which this report is collectively dedicated.

There was only one dissonant voice in the six years of engaging students in research about immigrant and migrant settlement. One student wanted to know why tax money should be given to “those people,” when Americans were in need. In hard times such as the current economic crisis, this question is more frequently posed. The answer, we believe, can be found in the specifics of this report, which documents how little refugees actually are given and how much they contribute. Refugees help ensure a young and vital workforce for the state, which can enable New Hampshire to continue to attract industry and new investment. They also contribute the richness of their cultural knowledge and the strength of their love of life. Further answers can also be found in the voices of the majority of students who worked on this research and related immigrant support activities, and of the New Hampshire residents we interviewed, who have worked directly with refugees. They learned from the refugees and immigrants with whom they worked and saw them as role models of human courage, generosity, and communal spirit in the face of unimaginable adversity. Refugees teach us that it is in hard times that our public morality and sense of humanity are challenged and tested.

This study was made possible with the assistance and support of one of several refugee resettlement agencies that works in New Hampshire. We agreed not to identify the agency in our report, which is not an evaluation of the work and commitment of the agency but an overview of the process of refugee resettlement through the experience of one cohort of refugees. However, we wish to gratefully acknowledge the generosity and openness of this agency and its director, without whom this report would not be possible.

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## **PART ONE: THE CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

### **1. The New Hampshire Debate about Refugee Resettlement**

Throughout its history, New Hampshire has offered people fleeing from the traumatic experiences of war, persecution, and lack of opportunities the possibility of beginning a new life. In the past, English, Afro-Caribbean, German, Irish, Russian, Polish, French-Canadian, African-American, Greek, and Lebanese migrants—among others—helped build the state and its economy. By the 1990s, the national press promoted an image of New Hampshire as a place whose people were white in skin color and culture and many New Hampshire residents accepted this image as an accurate portrayal of the past as well as the present reality of their state. Yet, migration had never fully stopped and increasingly, in the past few decades, immigrants have arrived from around the world.

Refugee resettlement programs continue this tradition of fostering immigrant settlement in New Hampshire. New Hampshire is one of many US states that has participated in the most recent federal program of refugee resettlement. The newcomers, although making up a very small percentage of the population of the state, may be changing the way people locally understand their state, past and present. The state's immigrant heritage is being revived not only in official reports but also by the people of the state. As one factory regional manager in Laconia stated when asked about refugees: "We were all foreigners at one time. By the way ... my ancestors are Polish."

Globally, the US remains the country with the highest rate of resettlement. However, despite the continuing wars in the Middle East and Africa, refugee admissions to the United States generally have been declining since 2001. Moreover, each year the US State Department admits fewer than the official quota for refugee admission set by presidential order. In 2007, the quota was 70,000 in relationship to a US population of 302.2 million, but only 48,281 refugees were actually admitted into the United States.

Of that number, 250 were allocated to New Hampshire (US Department of Health and Human Services 2008). The number sent to New Hampshire is disproportionately small in terms of refugees admitted to the United States. Between the years 1997 and 2008, 4,851 refugees were resettled in New Hampshire. During that period, the largest cluster came from Europe (2,237); these were refugees from the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union. The second largest cluster (1,874) came from seventeen different African countries (New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, n.d.). The new refugees represent a tiny fraction (0.04%) of the total NH population of 1.3 million (United States Department of Agriculture 2008), but they have been the subject of widespread public debate. Although various cities and towns have been sites of refugee settlement, most refugees have been resettled in the cities of Manchester and Concord.

Located fewer than 20 miles apart on the Merrimack River, Manchester and Concord are former mill towns of roughly 107,000 and 40,500 residents respectively. Both were historically places of immigrant settlement. Manchester, Concord, and Nashua remain more ethnically diverse than the rest of the state, which as a whole is 94% non-Hispanic white and 95% native born (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). The resettlement agency, on whose work this study draws, has over the years settled migrants in Manchester, Concord, and Laconia. Laconia, with a population of 16,500, is the only other location in New Hampshire that received more than 100 refugees between 2002-2008.

**Table 1. Refugee Resettlement by Municipality**  
**Federal Fiscal Year 2002 – 2008**  
 Extracted from New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning  
<http://www.nh.gov/oep/programs/refugee/facts.htm> (accessed June 2009)

	FY 02	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05	FY 06	FY 07	FY 08	Total
<b>Manchester</b>	182	195	471	165	146	99	246	1504
<b>Laconia</b>	33	5	8	15	55	13	59	188
<b>Concord</b>	11	38	75	126	54	94	192	590

As this report demonstrates, individuals and local governments who have become involved in refugee resettlement, even as they shoulder the responsibility and take refugee families into their lives, often question federal refugee policy that places struggling, sometime traumatized, individuals and families in New Hampshire. They ask: “Why here and why these people?” and sometimes conclude that no more should be sent. Some refugees also wonder why they have been placed in New Hampshire and subsequently move to cities in states that have a better infrastructure of support services.

In point of fact, New Hampshire needs a young and working population and refugees make a small but vital contribution to fill this need. For those concerned with the “ageing of the population, slow growth in total population and decline of the young adult population in New England and the state,” refugees are good news (Gitrell 2007). However, although no official numbers are kept of those who leave New Hampshire to settle elsewhere, there are several indications that many of the 4,851 refugees initially settled in New Hampshire have chosen to leave. It may well be that the 51% of our sample who reportedly had left the state are indicative of the general pattern and that at least half the refugees settled in New Hampshire eventually leave. Others with refugee status —most likely a much smaller number— arrived in New Hampshire after originally settling elsewhere. Those few thousand refugees who have permanently settled in New Hampshire since 1997 contribute to the continuing economic and social viability of the state.

City officials and some local residents have pointed out a number of problems that confront refugee resettlement, especially in terms of the lack of support services. Federal programs provide relatively little support for the refugees once they arrive here. This is particularly a problem in New Hampshire because, although it is one of the states with the highest per capita income, this state provides few social services for any of its residents struggling to obtain education, transportation, and adequate income. In 2004, in Manchester, when the number of refugees who arrived was higher than previous years, the city of Manchester created a Refugee Resettlement Advisory Committee and commissioned a report. The report claimed that refugees were placing a disproportionate strain on education, health services, and welfare (Manchester City Government 2006). Critics of the report such as the city welfare commissioner pointed out that in the year of the report (2005-2006) refugees represented only 2% of the Manchester families receiving any city welfare support. The city expended only \$12,474 on refugee welfare support out of a budget of \$498,188 (Brooks 2006). The report was also challenged on the grounds that refugee children were not the primary recipients of English language instruction for newcomers in the public schools (Brooks 2006).

Our study contributes to the ongoing assessment of refugee resettlement in New Hampshire. The persons in our study used relatively few services, most of which are federally supported, such as the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. Since most of the people in our study worked and paid federal taxes, the refugees were contributing to the tax base, from which federal expenditures that support health, welfare, Social Security pensions, roads and the military, are drawn. As this report indicates, most refugees in our study obtained support from volunteers rather than official services.

In response to the struggles of refugees, many residents of New Hampshire have come forward to personally and collectively provide community-based support for the newcomers. Refugees also receive vital assistance from other refugees, many of whom come from other countries of origin. Volunteer efforts are documented in this report, since they provide insights into New Hampshire and its people. This report also documents how this new sector of the population contributes to the vitality of the state. Many



refugees participate in the social networks, informal institutions, and fabric of sociability that are at the basis of local community. They teach, even as they learn; they give, even as they take. They contribute labor and taxes, while at the same time they highlight the need for more public services for all residents of the state. In New Hampshire, refugees and other newcomers generally do not live solely within their own communities; they both build local cultural or religious support networks and become part and parcel of the richness of local life.

## **2. Public Policy Background Information**

Our conversations with public officials, community members, and service providers revealed that information about US immigration policy in general and refugee policy in particular has not been widely disseminated. Consequently, while public debate is heated, it is often misinformed. In order to make sense of our findings, it is important to review some basic information about refugees and the resettlement process. We were often told that refugees are people who are forced to flee home and cannot return to their place of origin, while many claim that immigrants come for economic reasons and are free to return home. This common sense division between refugee and immigrant is not reflected either in the experiences in US public policy. Many people who are forced to flee from horrific war or political repression are not defined as refugees by the US legal procedures.

### **a. What is a Refugee and What is an Immigrant?**

Very few people are permitted to settle permanently in the US. Except for people in highly skilled professions, most people who come as immigrants are close relatives of permanent US residents or citizens. People who are citizens have the right to bring their spouses, parents, children, and siblings, although the wait may be many years long and the costs high.<sup>1</sup> A second path of entry is as a refugee. This path is open only to those who are determined by US authorities to comply with the official US definition of the term. The general public, the United Nations, and the United States have very different definitions of a refugee.

To the general public a refugee is someone who is forced to flee his or her home and community to escape war, violence, political or religious persecution, or disaster. The United Nations' definition partially reflects this perspective but eliminates those who flee natural disasters and war. It defines a refugee as "a person who, owing to 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" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2007). The UN definition excludes all those forced to leave home because of devastation of flood, drought, earthquake, volcano, or tsunami, no matter how devastating the circumstance. It also excludes those who flee from civil war, invasion, or dictatorship, unless the individuals fleeing a government are recognized as political opponents or members of a persecuted group.

Although the United States is a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, many people who fit the UN definition are not accepted as refugees by the United States, while some such as Cubans, who would not be seen as refugees by the UN, are refugees according to the US government. "A person is eligible for US resettlement only if he or she has a particularly compelling history of persecution; or is a member of an ethnic or religious group that is considered by the United States to be of 'special humanitarian concern' (for some groups, only those with relatives in the United States are eligible); or is the spouse, unmarried child under 21, or parent of a refugee who has been resettled in the United States" (Cultural Orientation Resource Center 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> The one significant exception to this pattern is a "diversity lottery" (Diversity Immigrant Visa Program established by the US Congress. The lottery allows up to 50,000 visas for individuals from countries underrepresented in the United States to come as immigrants, together with their immediate families, if their application is randomly selected. Winners must be able to pay the extensive fees, purchase air tickets, and pass security checks ([http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1322.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1322.html)).

Except for certain cases linked to designated groups or high profile individuals, a member of the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) examines an applicant's proof of eligibility through a UN process and an interview. The interview is usually organized after an individual has been living for a year or more in a refugee camp. Once a US agency has granted refugee status and an individual passes security clearance, s/he enters the refugee process. Half of the refugees in our study had lived in refugee camps and all had gone through the refugee process of orientation, travel to the United States through an air ticket loan program, settlement through a contracted agency, and the termination of all resettlement support after eight months—at the longest.

### **b. The Refugee Process: How Refugees Come to New Hampshire**

Before leaving for the United States, the newly certified refugee is given a brief cultural orientation about the United States and the resettlement process. The social service agency awarded the resettlement contract arranges for the newcomers to be met at the airport and provides a limited number of services for a brief period. Then, in most cases, the refugees are officially on their own. If the application has been made for several members of a family and they are all accepted into the process, they are generally able to travel and settle together. If the refugee or refugee family has close relatives already settled in the United States, resettlement with these kin is often possible. But otherwise, the US resettlement agencies follow a policy of distributing refugees according to resettlement contracts that give various local social service agencies a certain number of people to resettle every year.

### **3. History of the Study and Methodology**

The research for this study consisted of two parts:

- (1) interviews with 76 refugees who had been recently settled in New Hampshire by the resettlement agency in 2006-2007, and who had been in the US more than eight months<sup>2</sup> and;
- (2) interviews, conducted in the summer of 2008, with 26 individuals who were involved in refugee resettlement in the cities of Concord and Laconia.<sup>3</sup> City officials, police officials, church leaders and activists, employers, journalists, and community-based volunteers were interviewed.

Table 2 provides a profile of the refugees interviewed. As this table indicates, those interviewed came from eleven different countries. The largest clusters were Uzbekistan, Somalia, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Because each refugee is treated as an individual case for purposes of settlement and because refugee stories are shaped by individual experiences of gender and age, we interviewed each person who had resettled, even though several refugees might have lived in the same household. In total, the 76 refugees of our sample lived in 47 different households. The refugees interviewed came from the 194 people who had been settled in New Hampshire during the designated study period of October 2006 and December 2007. Refugee interviews began in January 2007 and continued for the next year.

Out of those who were not interviewed, 99 refugees (51%) had left the area or could not be found and most likely had left New Hampshire. We cannot say whether those who had left resembled those who stayed. However, we spoke to most of the remaining refugees (85%) who were eligible for the study. Therefore this report can be seen as reflecting the experiences and opinions of the refugees who had settled in Concord and Laconia from 2006-2008. Since both the economic situation in the state and the demographic profile of the refugees who come to New Hampshire often changes rapidly, the report represents a single snapshot, but one, we argue, that can contribute to ongoing discussion of refugee needs and policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Eight months is generally the cut off date for most support.

<sup>3</sup> This report also builds on insights gained from interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2001-2005 with immigrants and refugees living in Manchester and with local officials of government and non-government organizations in that city. A MacArthur Foundation Human Security Grant to Nina Glick Schiller and Thad Gulbrandsen and a UNH Sidore Fellowship from the Center funded that study for the Humanities. Research assistance was provided by Peter Buchannan.

**Table 2: Demographic Profile of Participants (N=76)**

<b>Demographic Characteristic</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	55.3
Male	44.7
<i>Age: Average Age</i>	34.7
<i>Relationship Status</i>	
Single	30.3
Married	63.2
Widowed	6.6
<i>Number of Months in US: average</i>	19.3
<i>Previously Lived in Refugee Camp: Yes</i>	50.0
<i>Education</i>	
No formal education	14.5
Schooling but less than high school degree	47.4
High school degree; some college or technical	26.3
University; graduate study	11.8
<i>Family Members Who Came With Participant to US</i>	
No one	16.9
Spouse	58.4
Child	18.2
Mother/Father	13.6
Sister/Brother	32.5
In-laws	3.9
Cousin	1.3
<i>Participant's Nationality/ Country of Origin</i>	
Burundi	1.3
Cameroon	5.2
Congo (DRC)	6.5
Equatorial Guinea	1.3
Ethiopia	2.6
Liberia	10.4
Sierra Leone	2.6
Somalia	21.7
Sudan	9.1
Tanzania	1.3
Uzbekistan	36.4

## PART TWO: REFUGEE PERSPECTIVES

### 1. Why We Left Home

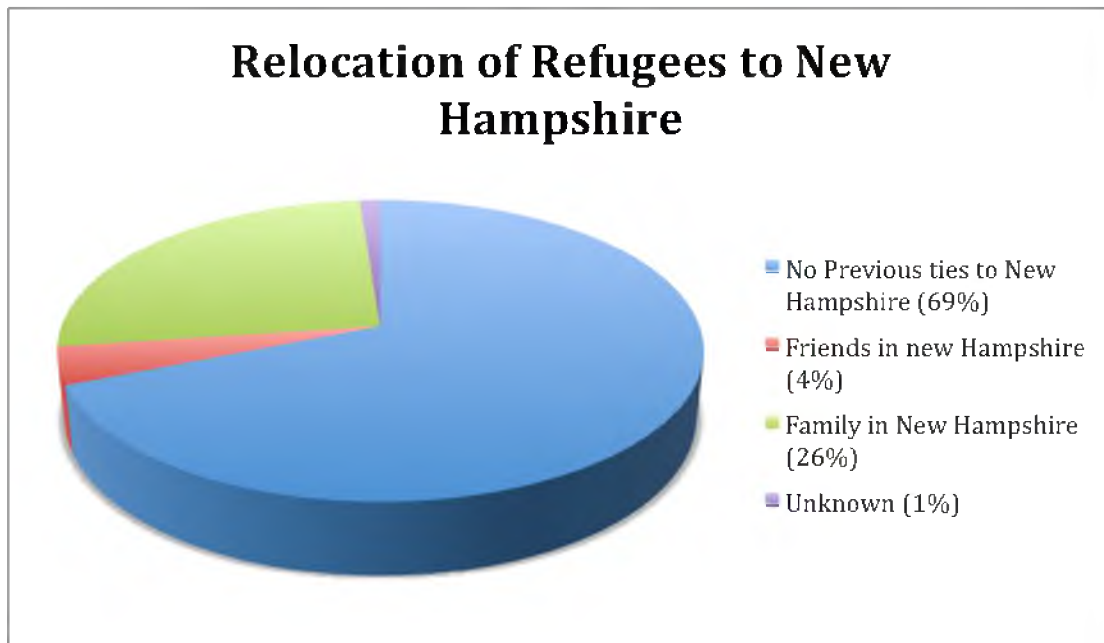
The refugees we interviewed had come to the United States after surviving various forms of political trauma. Many of the refugees were forced to leave home because of war in their home country. For example, as one refugee stated: “In my country there is fighting, there is a war there. The war is between southern Sudan and northern Sudan. So, we are afraid of the government and the rebels in southern Sudan. When the fighting started there, there was no security in southern Sudan.” Because of the situation in the refugees’ countries of birth, they were forced to live in other countries before relocating to the United States. One woman explained that she fled was her country to Ghana because “in my country they killed my father and brother and they raped me.” She was confined to the refugee camp in Ghana from 1996-2006 before moving to the United States. A minority of the refugees had experiences of political persecution or discrimination. These included imprisonment after speaking out for Muslim-Jewish unity, support for opposition political candidates, and being denied legal rights including schooling, work, and marriage on the basis of minority ethnic status.

“In my country they killed my father and brother and they raped me.”

### 2. Why New Hampshire?

Each year, the US Department of State distributes the number of refugees that they have decided to accept to the various states by allocating newcomers to 450 voluntary agencies around the country that resettle refugees. Neither the local resettlement agency nor local officials have the power to decide how many people will officially be allocated to New Hampshire or how many (usually fewer) will actually arrive. A NH official involved in the negotiation reported:

We ... disseminate information that comes to us through the State Department. ... It comes to us in a document in August and then we can share it... through the Refugee Advisory Council [made up of state and city agencies and local governments]. And then people can give feedback on that number and what they think about that level of resettlement for their community... But ultimately it is the State Department’s decision.



More than two-thirds of the refugees interviewed (68%) did not have family members or friends in New Hampshire and did not choose the specific city in which they settled. During the years of our study, the resettlement agency to which these refugees had been assigned decided that adaptation and

integration of refugees would be most rapid and effective if they were settled in areas without concentrations of new immigrants and refugees and placed them in Concord and Laconia.

Consequently, most refugees found themselves in places they have never heard of, living long distances from friends, acquaintances, or persons from their hometown or region. Most refugees (83%) did settle with a family member or were joined by family members; a few had friends already living in New Hampshire. A refugee from Uzbekistan

It's a place "to raise your children better"

noted that although her family did not ask to live in Laconia, the program knew that they had relatives there. She commented that "they try to keep family together. It is very difficult." In many cases, after having time to find work and meet people, refugees assessed New Hampshire very positively. A refugee from Cameroon said that New Hampshire was "a nice place, it's a quiet environment. Like, we used to hear about crimes taking place in other parts of the country, but I've never heard any crimes here... in Concord where I live, so I believe it is a suitable place." A Sudanese refugee similarly enjoyed the quiet environment of the region: "I think it is good, it is quiet, which is what I like. The people are good. I am not finding somebody who is my enemy here." Some refugees mentioned that they felt they had settled in a place that made it possible "to raise your children better." Others had longed for a better life, regardless of the place, and were content with New Hampshire. Another person told us: "I didn't know anything about here, I was ignorant. I didn't know the people or the culture. I didn't expect anything, really. The people in New Hampshire were very nice. Everything in New Hampshire was very good." However, our ethnography indicates that those refugees who either yearned to be part of a more settled immigrant community with its own cultural and religious institutions or were able to find more economic opportunities elsewhere left the state.

### 3. Becoming an American

Ninety-nine percent of the refugees wanted to become US citizens and all were eligible for citizenship. As one refugee said "If I become an American... it would be like a glory... The highest thing I can think is to try to bring some of my family people here that is why I so much need it. Because here is better life here than living in [my country], where there are troubles." After living in the United States for a year, refugees are eligible for permanent residence (a green card) and after five years can apply for US citizenship. Neither the resettlement agency nor the US government provides refugees with technical or financial assistance to obtain permanent residence status or apply for naturalization.<sup>4</sup> US permanent residence and citizenship is sought for many reasons, including the possibility of helping other family members out of hardship and danger. These legal statuses give refugees who have experienced terror and disruption a sense of security. Citizenship allows refugees to apply for family reunion for a wider range of relatives left behind (parents, adult children, and siblings). It also provides access to more jobs and the ability to travel abroad and visit dispersed family members with the protection of a US passport. Moreover, citizenship gives those naturalized the right to vote, ending the situation of taxation without representation. However, applying for citizenship, as well as family reunion, requires extensive paper work, a great deal of money, and knowledgeable legal assistance in order to fill the forms out correctly. The right to family reunion is precious to people who have seen members of their family, neighborhood, and community die from violence, "ethnic cleansing," and related hunger and disease.

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<sup>4</sup> It takes considerable knowledge of immigration procedures to fill out the necessary forms and applications are costly. The cost of naturalization is \$675 per person (<http://www.uscis.gov>). Applications for a family of four therefore are \$2100.

#### 4. Weaknesses of the Settlement Process

Through a contract with the US State Department, the resettlement agency received \$850 per refugee to provide services for the first thirty days of settlement. This included rent for initial housing, minimal furniture, house wares, clothing, and assistance in obtaining some basic support services such as food stamps and healthcare. After the first thirty days, the resettlement agency's level of responsibility was minimal with most subsequent efforts going into finding employment for refugees. Other federal programs administered through state offices provided some support with rent assistance, food stamps, cash assistance, and healthcare for up to eight months depending on a range of factors, including family income, size, and how soon a member of the family found work. After this brief eight month period, most support vanished; if a family was very poor and had many children or if a person was disabled, additional support may have been forthcoming. According to an official who administered federal funding to agencies in the state: "The goal of the federal program is to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency at the earliest time possible." This goal underlies the logic behind the minimal provision of assistance and its rapid diminution and the focus on "survival level English and employment services."

The very limited funding for refugee resettlement could not even provide for the initial needs of the refugees, given the minimal size of the grant and the high costs of housing in New Hampshire at the time of the study. The resettlement agency found itself unable to provide adequate housing, furnishings, bedding, house wares and clothing; they were able to supply secondhand furniture and bedding, one plate, one glass, a table setting and a pan.

The resettlement agency was often given very little notice of the arrival of new refugees. This meant that on occasion, the agency could not prepare for the newcomers and did not have the housing, food, or sufficient numbers of trained staff to cope with new arrivals. Reception failures led to increased trauma for the refugees. Months or years after their arrival they relived these experiences during the interview. Having survived danger, violence, and sometimes the death of family, friends, and neighbors and the destruction of home and property, these refugees had felt alone and abandoned when they arrived in New Hampshire. The stress of entering a new country with a new physical and cultural setting and language was heightened by the lack of warm reception or preparation.

Both the resettlement agency and the refugees agreed that even with sufficient planning, the agency could not offer adequate services to refugees. The agency pointed out several structural problems that were built into their contract to provide resettlement services:

- (1) The agency was provided with a limited and in fact shrinking amount of money set against a situation of rising costs of housing, utilities, food, and clothing.
- (2) Only very specific and limited services were mandated.
- (3) Minimal English lessons were usually provided by persons not trained in language teaching and classes were not organized in relationship to the disparate educational backgrounds of the refugees, which ranged from professionals to the illiterate.
- (4) Refugees were obliged to accept the first offer of employment, despite the lack of transportation to the job, English preparation, and appropriate clothing for the work situation or the weather.
- (5) The agency had inadequate staffing to meet refugee needs.
- (6) The agency faced legal mandates to stop providing services after a brief period.
- (7) The agency lacked the necessary staff to apply for special grants to supplement services.
- (8) The agency had little or no funding for translation services, except when special and temporary grants provided this funding.

Many respondents explained that despite an orientation session before leaving, what they found in the United States was very different from living conditions they had imagined. "It was not as expected ... I was expecting more opportunities for a job and free education." Some refugees described things going wrong from the very beginning. Not only was a couple from Africa not met promptly by a settlement worker when they arrived at the airport, but they also found a situation of no food or support: "First we waited for a long time in the airport and we didn't know where we were going ... [Then] we went 25 days with no food or nothing, no food stamps, and my wife was pregnant then. And we had to ask neighbors

for food; we were begging for food as if we were still in the refugee camp.”

Refugees often provided dramatic descriptions of their first few months. They described struggling through snowdrifts to walk several miles to go to jobs without boots, gloves, or in some circumstances winter coats. Some people were given packaged dry goods without instructions on cooking unfamiliar foods. If not arriving with family members, individuals were often initially housed in shared accommodations, sharing an apartment and even a bedroom with a stranger. Coming from the trauma of war, invasion, assault, and robbery, cohabiting with strangers in a strange land proved an extra stress for some refugees.

On the other hand, some refugees receiving a warm welcome, their entrance into New Hampshire eased by thoughtful volunteers. In Laconia, one woman remembered that two volunteers “had flowers and food to welcome us so I liked it.” Another woman from Laconia has had similar experiences: “Whenever somebody meets us, they always welcome us.”

Refugee assessment of the weaknesses of the resettlement process included:

- (1) Being deposited in an apartment without a way to contact or communicate with others, and inability to contact the resettlement agency because of a lack of telephone.
- (2) The lack of emotional support and practical information about how to obtain necessities.
- (3) The inadequacy of the clothing provided.
- (4) Lack of food or inadequate social services during the initial settlement process.
- (5) Lack of adequate or proper English instruction, while being criticized for failures to speak English.
- (6) Bedding or housing with bed bugs.
- (7) Poor public transportation and lack of money to take public transportation.
- (8) Non-responsiveness of agency members with requests for help, due to the under-funding of the agency.
- (9) Being housed with strangers upon arrival.

## **5. Accessing Benefits**

Upon entry, refugees are eligible for a limited number of services. It is the responsibility of the resettlement agency to help refugees connect with services for which they are eligible and that they may need. The services available are from various funding sources (federal, state, local, private/charitable) and differ in terms of their eligibility requirements (age, income, disability) and the period of time during which the refugee is entitled to services. Support services such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps may help an entire household; eligibility is determined by a household’s combined income. A few services such as English lessons are person specific, although their provision also assists members of a household. Because the various kinds of assistance come from different agencies and exist in a patchwork quilt of varying eligibility requirements, accessing support services during the resettlement process can be distressing and confusing for the refugees (many of whom arrive unable to speak English) and for the members of the community who assist these newcomers.

**Table 3: Awareness of and Use of Social Services by Individuals (N=76)\***

Type of Social Service	Never Heard About	Heard About; not applied for	Applied For; not yet obtained	Received: not currently	Receiving Currently
Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled (APTD)	90.8	5.3	1.3	2.6	--
English as a Second Language	17.1	19.7	--	36.8	26.3
Food pantry	35.5	13.2	--	14.5	36.8
Food stamps	--	2.6	--	51.3	46.1
Housing assistance/Section 8	32.9	14.5	25.0	3.9	23.7
Medicaid	1.3	5.3	2.6	63.2	27.6
Public housing	47.4	30.3	9.2	3.9	9.2
Supplemental Security Income	75.0	11.8	1.3	2.6	9.2
TANF (cash assistance welfare)	61.8	9.2	--	19.7	9.2
Training/educational programs	76.3	3.9	--	6.6	13.2
Unemployment insurance	71.1	17.1	--	9.2	2.6
Vocational rehabilitation	93.4	3.9	--	2.6	--
Women, Infant, Children (WIC)	38.7	17.3	--	16	28
Workmen's compensation	74	21.9	2.7	--	1.4

\* Respondents chose the category that best describes their situation. The categories are mutually exclusive

**Table 4: Awareness of and Use of Social Services by Percent of Households (N=47)\* \*\***

Type of Social Service	Never Heard About	Heard About; not applied for	Applied For; not yet obtained	Received: not currently	Receiving Currently
Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled (APTD)	87.2	10.6	--	2.1	--
English as a Second Language	14.9	10.6	14.9	29.8	29.8
Food pantry	36.2	12.8	8.5	4.3	38.3
Food stamps	--	4.3	--	42.6	53.2
Housing assistance/Section 8	25.5	25.5	21.3	2.1	25.5
Medicaid	2.1	4.3	2.1	57.4	34
Public housing	42.6	34	8.5	4.3	10.6
Supplemental Security Income	74.5	12.8	2.1	2.1	8.5
TANF (cash assistance welfare)	70.2	17	21	6.4	4.3
Training/educational programs	68.1	6.4	10.6	4.3	10.6
Unemployment insurance	70.2	17	2.1	6.4	4.3
Vocational rehabilitation	91.5	4.3	2.1	2.1	--
Women, Infant, Children (WIC)	34	17	2.1	17	29.8
Workmen's compensation	68.1	25.5	4.3	--	2.1

\* Respondents chose the category that best describes their situation. The categories are mutually exclusive.



Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate that refugees differ in their awareness and use of available social services. The most well-known and often used services are food stamps and Medicaid. At least 90% of individual refugees and refugee households reported having used these two social services. Refugees reported varying levels of use of three additional types of social programs: ESL programs, food pantries, and Women, Infant, Children nutrition services (WIC).<sup>5</sup> Refugees have had much less familiarity with, and thus use of, other social programs, including housing assistance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF),<sup>6</sup> unemployment insurance programs, workmen’s compensation, services for individuals with disabilities, vocational rehabilitation, and training/educational programs (such as vocational rehabilitation for the disabled). The percent of individual refugees and refugee households who had not heard about such programs ranged from 35% to 93%. The longer that refugees had been in the United State, the more likely they were aware of some of these services, including public housing, TANF, unemployment insurance, WIC and food pantries.

Some of the problems refugees confronted in trying to build a decent life for themselves and their families in New Hampshire were specific to their refugee histories and circumstances. These included the need to learn English as an additional language and the need for psychological support after situations of extreme trauma. However, most of the needs of refugees were similar to other members of the working poor in New Hampshire who, despite the fact that they work hard and pay taxes, face daily problems of securing adequate transportation, good and safe working conditions, adequate affordable healthcare, affordable housing, further education, and childcare.

## 6. Settling In

### a. Learning English

No educational authority in New Hampshire or in a specific city has responsibility for overseeing English teaching, for non-English speakers in order to ensure that classes for newcomers are taught consistently, have competent teachers, or are evaluated and improved over time. The resettlement agency has no funding of its own to maintain English classes. Municipalities, school systems, churches, and volunteer organizations all provide classes, but the number and quality of classes varies with the locality and the year. There are some federal funds distributed by the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning through a procedure of periodic grants that are “under no obligation to fund the volunteer agencies.” The agencies usually receive the funds “because they are the ones that are providing the initial English and employment services in this area, but for instance, if someone came along and said, we’ve got this great cost-effective English program that we’re piloting in Concord and we’re going to submit a proposal to you, then the committee would look at that proposal just as they would for the [resettlement agency].”

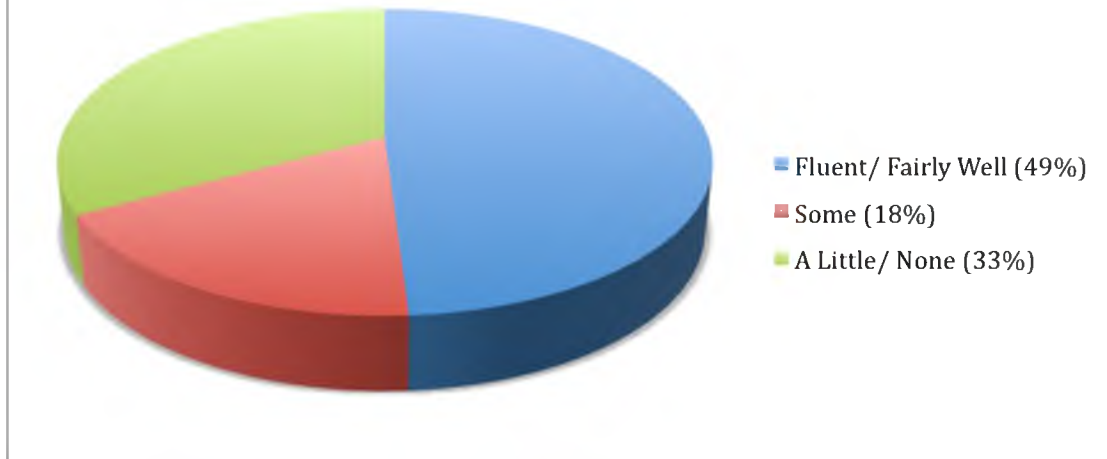
“The main thing for me is my English. English!”

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<sup>5</sup> “WIC provides nutrition education and nutritious foods to help keep pregnant women, new mothers, infants and preschool children healthy and strong” (New Hampshire Department of Social Services 2009a).

<sup>6</sup> TANF is the current form of federal welfare benefits, awarded to each state as a block grant. Generally it provides cash assistance. In New Hampshire the program “provides temporary financial and medical assistance to families with dependent children. To qualify, the dependent children must lack parental support or care due to death, continued absence, or because one or both parents in a two-parent home are disabled, unemployed, or working less than 100 hours a month.” Parents of families eligible for financial assistance are also eligible for Medicaid and their children are eligible for medical coverage. The benefits are generally only available to families in which total household assets are under \$1000 (not including homes and automobiles necessary to get to work). With some exceptions, there is a lifetime eligibility cap of 60 months (New Hampshire Department of Social Services 2009b).

## Refugee English Skills at the Time of Interview



The vast majority (87%) of the refugees had studied some English either at school in their home country, in a refugee camp, or in the United States. A few had come to the US from English-speaking countries. Almost half of our respondents (49%) reported that they could speak English “fairly well” or “well” by the time of the interview. About a third of the respondents (32%) were confident enough of their English to choose to be interviewed in English, indicating their language proficiency. Although they had been in the United States two years or less, only a third indicated that they knew little or no English (33%).

At the same time, English remains a continuing challenge for these refugees. For many, English is not their second language but their third, fourth or fifth. Most agreed that learning English or improving their English was an urgent task for them. One refugee emphatically noted the importance of learning English: “The main thing for me is my English. English! That is my priority! Without it, I don’t get money, I don’t make money.”

Many expressed frustration in learning, improving or perfecting their English in the face of limited opportunities for formal training. The resources and the opportunities for refugees to study English are limited for several reasons:

- 1) Refugees are required to take the first job offered; many must abandon English lessons arranged by the resettlement agency after a few weeks.
- 2) Lessons provided by the resettlement agency are not adequate. Only three months of training are stipulated for refugees who have not yet found work and these classes are not intensive language training.
- 3) Learner needs are not being met due to the lack of professionalization of teachers and the challenge of placing students of all levels of educational backgrounds within the same class, so that people with advanced degrees learn with people who are illiterate.
- 4) The resettlement agency does not provide transportation to English lessons. One refugee said: “I used to go to English class, but I stopped because we don’t have a ride.”
- 5) Childcare is often not provided.

“I used to go to English class, but I stopped because we don’t have a ride.”

Refugees learn English in various ways. In some cases, people are able to locate evening classes and find ways to attend.

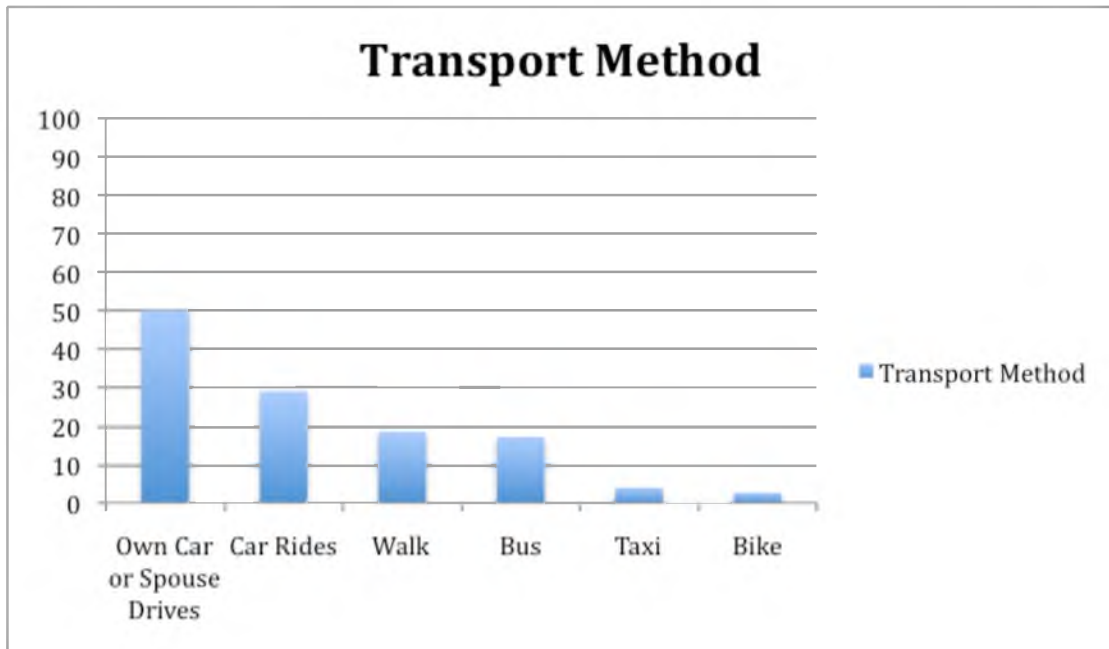
If a city provides free English lessons during both day and evening hours, it is more likely that individuals will be able to attend. One woman explained that her husband finished work at 4:30pm and then went to

school until 9:30pm, while she watched the children. In this case, the husband was only able to learn English because his wife stayed at home. Fortunately, in her case there was a two-hour morning ESL class with some childcare provided by the resettlement agency with the support of a grant. She triumphantly reported to us, “And also myself I am going to school for the morning time... [I am learning] how to read, how to write.”

Sometimes volunteers who provide more individualized teaching have made it possible for refugees to grasp the fundamentals of English, which then enables refugees to continue to learn by other means. One refugee noted that volunteers helped him begin to learn English and then “took me to the high school where I learned English. They signed us up, brought us there, and brought us home. Two days a week, 6:30-9pm.” Others refugees learn on the job. One man explained: “Everyone at work is kind and helpful. They try to help me with English.”

Some of the adult refugees interviewed have learned English from their children who obtained intensive language experience through ESL classes at school. In some cases refugees helped other refugees learn English. A refugee who could speak English fluently said that he helped other refugees with their English: “There were some girls who came here and couldn’t speak English. I gave them a list of words and helped them.”

### b. Finding Transportation



Almost a third of refugees reported not having enough transportation to “do the things that they need to do.” Transportation problems are particularly acute during the first months of resettlement. By the time of our interviews, more than half of refugees and 60% of the households reported using a vehicle owned by a member of the household as a mode of transportation. When asked how they got around town, 62% of the refugees reported driving, getting rides in household or other cars. The remainder walked (18%), took buses (17%) or used a bicycle (3%).

The lack of public transportation in New Hampshire has meant that refugees, like other low-income individuals, must put scarce resources into purchasing and maintaining an automobile and obtaining a driver’s license. One-third of all of the refugees reported having difficulty obtaining their license.

A central paradox of refugee resettlement is that refugees must accept the first job that is offered to them, but no one is obliged to provide the refugee with transportation to the place of work. Many

refugees reported losing jobs or being unable to gain access to services such as ESL or medical care because of a lack of transportation.

Insufficient transport can also isolate refugees. One refugee said, “When we came it was winter. We had no phone. No means of transportation. We literally didn’t see anyone for two weeks, we just looked out the window and it was lonely.” For a female refugee in Concord, relying on rides from family and public transport continued to make shopping and going to work very difficult. She explained, “When my brothers are not around to take me to the shops, I need to wait until they come home ... because there are times when I don’t have even one dollar to pay a bus. If I have to go to work in the afternoon, I don’t have money to pay a taxi.”

“There is a problem about the rent, sometimes the money runs out.”

Transportation is both costly and difficult to obtain. Whether refugees pay others for transportation to work or buy and maintain a car themselves, the costs are burdensome. When detailing her monthly wage and expenses, a refugee in Laconia pointed out that the cost of transport makes it difficult to pay other bills. For “transport I pay \$240! I ... get [earn] \$592 ... So how can I pay \$240? We have to pay house rent, we have to eat, we have to do everything! We are still suffering.”

### c. Working and Paying Bills

Sometimes the resettlement agency’s work placement efforts were efficient and effective. The refugee was placed in a job almost immediately and therefore quickly became a productive worker and taxpayer. This immediate transition from refugee to worker happened most frequently if the newcomer could speak English. Most newcomers did find employment within a few months. The majority of respondents (80%) indicated that they had worked since arriving in New Hampshire and 78% of the refugees held jobs at the time of the interview. The rate of employment for the household (including spouses, parents, and in-laws) was even higher, with 97% of respondents reporting that some family member in the household had worked since arriving. Reasons for being outside the workforce at the time of the interview included age, disability, or the presence of young children in the household. Judging by our sample, the percentage of the refugee population in the workforce was higher than that the labor force participation of 71% in New Hampshire in 2006 (Carsey Institute 2007).

The jobs refugees performed were almost universally “low-skilled jobs,” such as working in factories, fast food restaurants, nursing homes, or as housekeepers. One member of the sample worked in a community service organization; all others held unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, despite the fact that 12% reported some college or postgraduate education. The refugees interviewed earned considerably more per hour than the 2007 minimum wage for New Hampshire or the United States (\$5.15/hour in New Hampshire; \$5.85/hour in the United States).<sup>7</sup> The average income for a refugee was \$9.57 an hour, which, if a person worked full-time, would equal an annual salary of \$19,905. However, many of the refugees in the study did not work full time, were subject to layoffs, were laid off for injury without compensation, or found only seasonal or temporary employment. Generally, respondents reported that they did not receive increased payment for overtime. Less than half said that their employers offered vacation time. If there was vacation time, time off for sickness was often counted as vacation. However, given the cost of living in New Hampshire, including expensive housing, refugees faced particularly difficult resettlement conditions in this state despite the higher than average minimum wage they earned. Information from the interviews suggested that some refugees left New Hampshire in search of a place with a lower cost of living. On average there were three individuals per refugee household in the workforce. If everyone in these households was working full time, total household income would have

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<sup>7</sup> The hourly rate in New Hampshire was raised to \$6.50 on September 2007. In 2007, the US Department of Health and Human Services’ guidelines judged that a family of four would need more than \$20,650 a year to be living above the poverty line (Employment Support Institute 2009). According to a UNH cost of living study (UNH Office of Economic Initiatives 2006), in 2006 with a family of four with two children and two parents working would need a yearly income of \$48,625 per year to meet basic needs. A two parent family, with one parent working and the other meeting childcare needs, would need \$36,857. A single parent family with two children would need \$40,569.

exceeded poverty levels. Often, however, not all members of the household were able to find work at the same time. Moreover, some of these households (17%) consisted of working adults who were friends or roommates and who shared housing costs but not other living expenses such as food, clothing, and transportation. This means that it is not possible to project a household income on the basis of the number of employed adults in a household.

Most of our respondents (80%) reported working before fleeing from their home country, although some were too young to work. Several were previously craftsmen including cobblers and mechanics. Fifteen percent had been professionals, officials or supervisors. None was able to practice his or her former occupations after settling in New Hampshire. One refugee noted, “I came to the country educated, but I can’t get a job [using my training even though] I came here as a tradesperson.”

Individuals in this study with a high school education or higher (38%) do not have earnings that reflected their education. People with college degrees had not found work commensurate with their credentials and uniformly have had low wage and low skilled work. A high school education or beyond has not yielded the rewards to refugees that it has to native born members of the population. Factors of racial prejudice as well as foreign background may contribute to this disparity: 63% of our sample was from Africa.

Refugees spoke about their money problems and fears. The newcomers were surprised that their benefits and support (including healthcare) were cut as soon as one member of the household found employment, presumably because the household was now above the income cutoff. One couple said that as soon as the husband started working they were made to sign papers stipulating that both their support services would stop three months after he began; the wife did not understand: “But what about me, why did they stop giving me the money? We needed everything: food, clothing.” Financial worries made resettlement difficult as families confronted the challenge of paying not only rent, but also heating, utilities, and transportation costs. It was initially hard for some to understand that rent bills did not include utilities: “Paying the electricity bill, paying the water bill, everything. You know, I never knew, they never told me that you were going to pay the rent, pay the electricity bill. They told me everything was included. But then after all, they began to tell me that they are not included so I have to pay.”

#### **d. Facing Discrimination/ Racism in the Workplace**

Discrimination mainly occurred in the workplace; offenders often lost their jobs. One refugee said that he faced problems from being a refugee and black at his work but “the person who used to do that was fired. There was one guy who was working with us he gave me a lot of hard times until—I never even went to report him because I don’t know how to go to report somebody. It was just another person who saw the way he was treating me and reported it and they fired him.” Another man said “One guy at work told be me he hated blacks. He was rude to me and people told the supervisor and he was suspended.”

“One guy at work told me he hated blacks. He was rude to me and people told the supervisor and he was suspended.”

Our ethnographic research identified that many refugee adults and children had been confronted with racist remarks and taunts. Many African refugees and those whose clothing marked them as different in culture or religion had some of these experiences. Refugee children sometimes face harassment from schoolmates that went unreported. For example, one young male refugee was constantly bullied by a female student who rode the school bus with him. The student would call him “nigger” and say, “You don’t belong here. Go back to Africa.” After facing this many times, the young man stood up and told her to stop. The bus driver banned the young refugee from the bus for the rest of the year, forcing him to walk to school. As one of the interviewers noted about the situation, “It is not a close walk, and it is December.”

While refugees reported discrimination, the officials, employers, or leaders of faith-based organizations who were interviewed generally did not acknowledge that there was outright discrimination against refugees or immigrants. They spoke of rude people and persons who had no public spirit. They thought that disrespect to refugees for any reason should be grounds for dismissal or censure. As one

pastor stated, “I can’t think of any group ... that would be treated negatively, simply because of their race or country of origin ... because people are getting used to seeing them on the street, interacting with them in the workplace.”

#### e. Housing

The initial housing conditions that many refugees faced were difficult. Many mentioned the problem of overcrowded, dirty, and shared accommodations. Many of the refugees had lived in decent homes before they were forced to leave their countries and have had difficulties adjusting to their new circumstances. One respondent in Laconia said, “It is very different here. We never rented [an] apartment, we always had our own house. For the first few months it was very difficult to live in a small apartment. My mother-in-law called it a cage.” Another refugee had a similar experience in terms of housing and overcrowded apartments: “When I came to New Hampshire, I was discouraged. When they told us we were coming, they said I would have our own house, but the first family [we lived with] gave problems. The room was overcrowded—there were four in one room.” A female refugee in Laconia noted that the apartment she was given was “very small, not clean, there was no heat. Two small bedrooms, very, very small. It was very bad, very bad. Very cold in the winter. There was frozen ice” inside the window. Much to the horror of the newcomers, the second hand furniture they were given was infested with bed bugs. We heard from several families that “the furniture and beds I was given were infested with bugs so I had to throw them out.” In other cases, because they had no money for furniture beyond the minimal amounts initially provided, refugees picked up furniture and bedding on the streets, which was often infested. Sometimes, because their apartment buildings had become infested, their furniture and belongs also soon were overrun by bedbugs.

“The furniture and beds I was given were infested with bugs, so I had to throw them out”

At the time of the study most refugees had found better accommodation or living arrangements that were satisfactory. During the period of interviewing, Concord and Laconia had a higher vacancy rate than Manchester, which made better quality housing more available. However the high cost of housing remained an ongoing challenge everywhere. Although refugees were eligible for federal housing assistance, a third of the respondents (33%) had not heard about these programs and only 28% had or were currently using them. There are long waiting lists for public housing and this scarcity is reflected in the fact that only 15% of those interviewed reported having used or were currently living in public housing.

#### f. Health and Access to Health Care

Health issues were often pressing because refugees arrived with health difficulties as a result of the violent conditions they experienced; some struggled with chronic disease. A health examination is part of the initial health services provided at the time of arrival and newcomers were screened for some infectious diseases. Therefore, all of the refugees reported having received a general physical exam since arriving in New Hampshire. At the time of the interview most refugees did not have access to either physical or mental health services. Initially refugees were eligible for Medicaid: 91% reported having received this benefit. However, by the time of the interviews only 26% were still receiving this service (either because no one in the family was working at the time of the interview or the household income was too low for their family size so they were still eligible).

“They don’t give you sick days. If you are sick, you are paid from your vacation.”

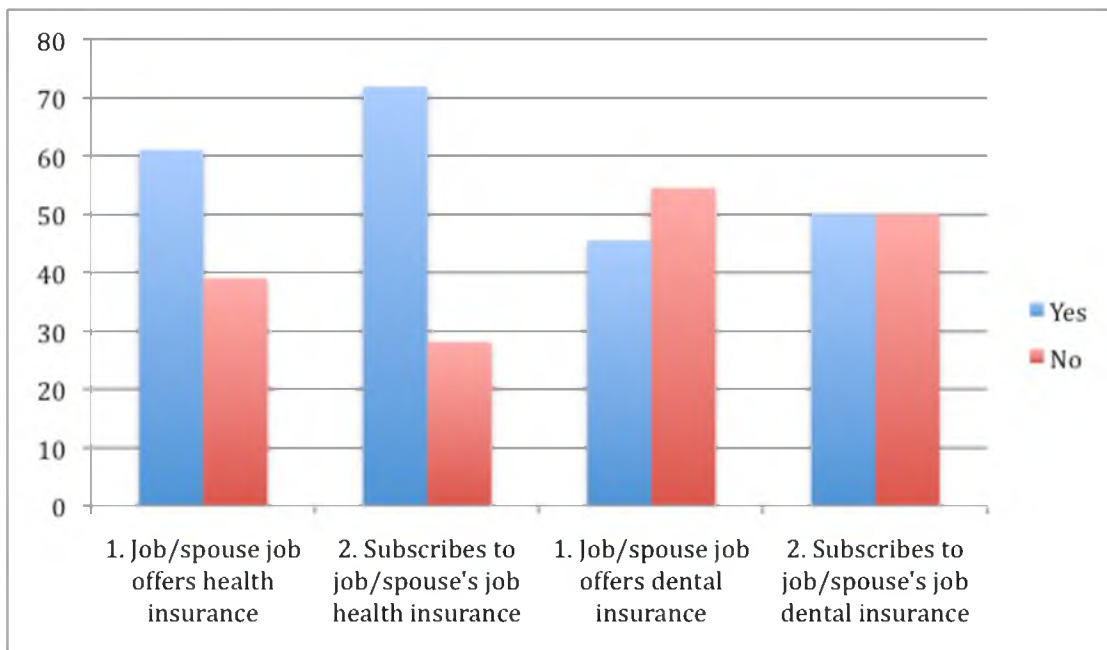
“I’m supposed to take two tablets a day and I only take one because it is too expensive.”

Even though this was a young population, their working conditions and past history put them at risk. The stress of trying to settle without social support can exacerbate mental health problems produced by the trauma of war, persecution, and violence from which people escaped. In addition, many of the jobs

that the refugees hold held manual positions that required physical strength or the use of machinery that resulted in accidents.

The cost of medicines was a major problem and a number of refugees said that they could not afford the medication they required to treat their health problems. A refugee in Laconia said he was “prescribed some medicine, but I cannot buy it, it is very expensive.” Another said that “I’m supposed to take two tablets a day and I only take one because it is too expensive.”

Although the majority of refugees or their spouses (61%) were offered insurance by their jobs, a minority (28%) of those offered this benefit actually used it. In total, only a little more than half of the families (56%) reported some kind of medical coverage via employers or Medicaid. Because some employer-based benefits only covered the individual and because some of the Medicaid coverage was actually the N.H. Healthy Kids program and covered children, the total of the insured is actually considerably lower.



Dental coverage was also rarely accessed, even when it was offered; only 45% of employees were offered dental insurance, and of this group, only half subscribed. In the cases of both medical and dental insurance, respondents could not afford premium levels, the insurance often came with high yearly deductibles charges, and sometimes respondents did not understand what was being offered. During one interview when the respondent told the interviewers that: “They say we have insurance but ... we have no proof. “ At this point, the refugee showed the interviewer the papers from the employer and in the papers was a health insurance card. The respondent didn’t recognize that card was the “proof” that they needed.

The refugees were also asked if they had been to see a health provider about depression or trauma. Only 8% had sought assistance for serious depression and trauma but this does not necessarily mean that they did not experience emotional difficulties. In answer to the question of whether anybody offered refugees assistance if they were sad, alone,

“When we feel sad, we talk to [the translator].”

confused, or afraid, 98% of those who answered the question said they had sought help from a relative or a friend. An elderly woman in Laconia responded, “Every night my sons and daughter in laws are coming to see me... My granddaughters and grandsons are coming to see me.” In some cases the “friend” was one of the volunteers or one of the translators. Several of the people who served as translators for the resettlement agency also selflessly helped newcomers by providing unpaid translation, information, and essential emotional support.

However, if there is domestic violence, multiple agencies and workers, including mental health services may be involved. In one instance, a woman with several children, including a daughter who had been traumatized by war and life in the refugee camp, found a combination of abusive conditions when she arrived. The family spent several months in a hotel with little food, and when finally settled in an apartment, the woman’s boyfriend threatened to kill her and sexually abused her mentally disabled daughter. Interviewers found the woman rocking back and forth depressed and almost in a trance. There was insufficient food to feed the children and insufficient money for laundry soap and diapers. Several agencies monitored the situation but this still left the woman in her apartment, afraid and unable to provide for her children.

About 40% of the refugees reported that they have been unwell since arriving in New Hampshire and half of those individuals reported that this was a new illness. Close to half of respondents indicated that they take medication and one-fifth of the sample reported that although there is a medication that they should take, they do not, generally because they cannot afford it. In cases of routine preventive medication for positive tests for TB (indicating a history of exposure rather than active illness) this can be quite serious in terms of evolving forms of drug resistant TB.

Disabled refugees also face problems of physical access. Sometimes the resettlement agency could not cope with the disability and did not provide adequate housing or transportation. One refugee who could not walk was placed in a third floor apartment. He also was unable to get to his medical appointments because he lacked transportation. On the other hand, other refugees have received excellent care. One man had been blinded when war came to his country. He had escaped by swimming through a latrine and lost his sight. He came to America as a refugee and since arriving he has had surgery in one eye and his sight was restored. Surgery in the other eye was planned.

Some of the illnesses and disabilities that refugees experienced were work-related. We heard a number of accounts of “on the job” injuries. It is notable that in almost all instances, the worker did not receive workmen’s compensation. Refugees did not have the sense of the entitlement that people born in the United States may have about the obligations of the employer to health and safety. As one newcomer stated, “The company is not responsible for what can happen to me.” Sometimes no help was extended to the injured worker from supervisors and it was co-workers who ensured that the refugee got to the hospital. For example, a man, described what happened when, new to the country and his job, he was injured at work: “The supervisor was there when this accident happened ... the owner was there and the owner disappeared in a second. They all disappeared ... nobody sent me to the hospital.” The only person who helped this refugee was “a Spanish man” who also worked at this workplace.

“They all disappeared.  
Nobody sent me to the  
hospital.”

Another refugee who was new to the country and injured at work was consequently fired. He did not received workmen’s compensation and was not provided with support. A call to the resettlement agency yielded only \$50. He was out of work with the injury for three months. His roommates, who were strangers to him when he arrived and were from different countries and ethnicities, supported him.

There were multiple pressures on refugees not to claim their rights. In many workplaces, they formed personal relationships with a supervisor. The supervisor served as source of support. If the refugee was injured, it became difficult to file a complaint without endangering that personal, ongoing, and necessary relationship. The end result was that the worker might be out “sick” without income. One man explained that he tried to carry a heavy bucket and hurt his back. The doctor said he should stay home for ten days but he was only paid for three days’ leave:



It's a tricky situation. Even though you should be getting workmen's comp, you don't want to upset your manger because it's a job... I don't know if I should get paid for something like that. We come from Africa and we don't need more problems here. I get \$10/ hour from my job, I live here with my wife. Look, now my daughter doesn't drink milk because we don't have money... she has diarrhea. She drinks juice. Now who will help me? The government doesn't help me; nobody helps me but my supervisor. He gives me food. That juice. The problem is the only one helping is the supervisor. And the owner of the company, he has helped me. All of the clothing that we have just he gave us. We [arrived here] without any clothing. He helped from the beginning.

Personalized relationships that refugees make with supervisors and owners may also act to divide the workforce, separating refugees from support and friendship with fellow workers. A refugee in Concord describes his situation:

I am in a good relationship with my supervisor and manager because they know I am hard working. But with the other workers, it's—I don't know what they thought—because I am black. ... They go behind my back and talk a lot ... because I am productive. And whenever there is overtime the supervisor will give it to me because he knows I will be able to work the required number of times that they want. Because at times if they say they have overtime for people that work six to six, but a lot of people don't want to stand that challenge.

#### **g. Relations with Police**

Refugees appreciated the public security they found in New Hampshire and had relatively little to say about the police. There were only three areas in which refugees reported contact with the police in ways that caused misunderstandings or problems on both sides.

##### **1) Obtaining transportation from an unlicensed driver:**

Refugees found themselves in the impossible position of being under a direct mandate to find a job and get to work, yet without access to transport. New refugees did not immediately start driving. They often depended on a more established immigrant or refugee for a ride. However, that person might not have a license. One refugee said that the resettlement agency: “found me a job to work without offering me transportation. I didn't have car, and they knew I didn't have a driver's license. I used to go with [another refugee] and that man had a car but he didn't have a driver's license. And he had an accident, and the police came. Then I was in trouble because I didn't know how to get to work.”

##### **2) Socializing in public places; drinking in public places:**

Refugees from various parts of the world are surprised by the lack of informal public sociability they find in New Hampshire. Unlike much of Europe and Africa, where there is widespread use of public space, the United States does not have a recent history of urban café society, or casual gathering. There are laws against public drinking and against public congregating, which is legally defined in many urban codes as vagrancy. One refugee was surprised that drinking in public was not allowed: “One day I went to a store and I bought my beer and I went outside I sat there and started to drink. So the guy who was inside, the cashier, told me that this is very dangerous and the police will arrest you if you do this. Like, [at home] ... we can do these things outside; there is no problem.”

“They found me a job to work without offering me transportation.”

##### **3) Physical punishment of children and the destabilizing of parental authority: domestic violence**

Refugee children are now routinely educated in schools to report to the police and authorities any instances of physical punishment of children. Refugees believed these lessons contributed to undermining their parental authority. Many came to believe that the police will come if they discipline their children and they fear police intervention. This is not to say that refugees systematically beat their children. However, like many older members of the New Hampshire population, refugees were brought up to believe that lack of respect for elders is a far greater offense than physical punishment of children. At the same time, the tensions of resettlement can precipitate increased levels of physical violence and domestic become another concern of refugees, particularly women.

## **h. Religious Participation**

Most, if not all refugees state that moving to the United States has not changed their religious beliefs. Many of the Muslim refugees said they have to pray at home because there is not a mosque to go to in Concord or Laconia—the closest is in Manchester. When asked if they still practiced their religion in the US, a Somalian refugee in Concord said that he practiced his Muslim faith from home as he “cannot go to Manchester” to the mosque there.

Other respondents noted the difference in the way religion is practiced in the United States. One respondent said that they still went to church because they were Christian but “the way of worship is different than the way we worship. The preaching style is different here.” Some refugees stopped attending religious services because of these differences. Many people reported they found less spirituality, spiritual community and religious commitment in New Hampshire than in their country of origin.

## **i. Sociability and Ethnic Organization**

In the history of migration in the United States, including in Manchester, migrants often grouped together with people of the same nationality to give each other mutual support. They came together to pray and conduct the life rituals of birth, marriage, and death in a familiar language and with a known set of customs. This collective solidarity is not a spontaneous occurrence. It is a product of the development of a critical mass of people of the same background in the same locality, who have experience living, working, and organizing in that locality. Since the 1960s, in many cities in the United States an infrastructure of foundations, social services, and governmental organizations have offered a modicum of funding, resources, and support to such community organizing. In contrast, New Hampshire has offered relatively little support for building community organizations for newcomers.

“I am the only one from Africa. It was not easy for me when I just start the job there.”

In addition, the question of community is complicated because of the existing divisions that refugees bring with them from their home country. In addition, developing these organizations can be difficult because the refugees work long hours and often use their spare time to attend English lessons. Therefore, there are relatively few organizations of refugees and immigrants in the state. There are, however, some informal networks where refugees and immigrants who have had several years of experience in New Hampshire give advice to newcomers. In some cases these networks create a sense of common identity. For example, a locally based African identity that crosses national, language, and to some extent religious differences (since Africans are divided among Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims) has begun to develop in New Hampshire.

Despite the many barriers, some ethnic organizations are emerging. They serve a variety of purposes including celebrating particular holidays or occasions, or providing networks of support that teach new skills such as English or driving. For example, in 2005, a refugee who arrived in 2003 began to organize a Somali Bantu community organization; similarly, the Southern Sudanese in Manchester rented a building and developed a community organization to offer English classes.<sup>8</sup>

Community organizing is also impeded by tensions between refugees that arise because of the complex rules that differentially allocate entitlements to benefits programs and cash supports. Sometimes the resettlement agency is accused of favoritism toward particular ethnic groups because of these differential allocations. For example, one man told us: “When we moved here, there are some refugees that [the resettlement agency] paid their rent for a several months, but they only paid ours for two months. They furnished their house so well, did a lot of things for them, but with us they did not.”

Conditions at a work place may be isolating. While there are workplaces in the Manchester area where a newcomer can find a cluster of people from the same ethnic background or language group, in

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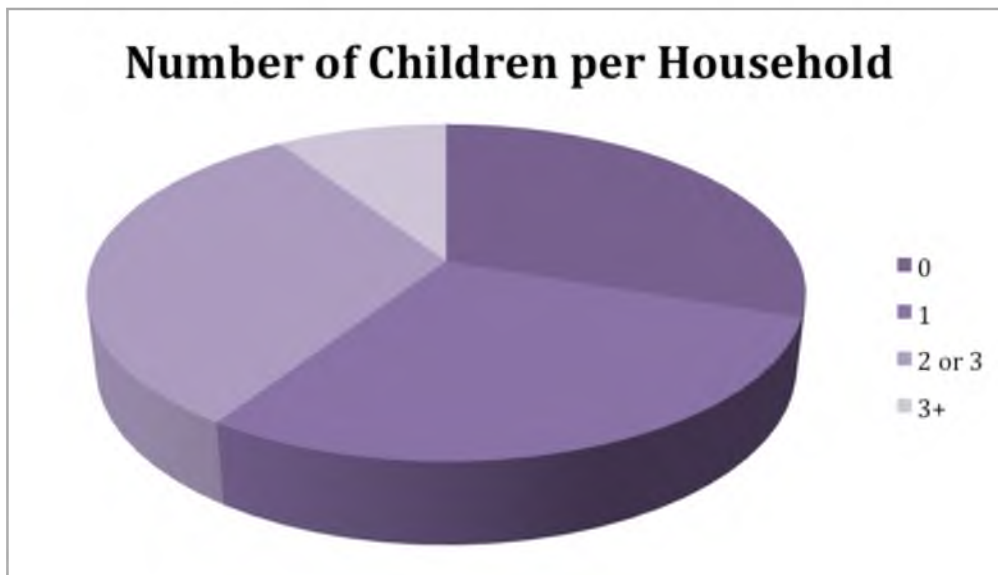
<sup>8</sup> By 2009, with the assistance of an anonymous donor, several organizations of African immigrants and refugees in Manchester were able to jointly rent a building and offer services.

some cases there is no one from his or her background or continent. It is common to hear a refugee report that “I didn’t meet anyone from my community, from my country.” However, very few people were isolated in the sense of having no social supports; almost all had contact with family, neighbors, and volunteers. At the same time, compared to the solidarities of communities of origin, refugees feel themselves to be alone.

#### **j. Family Life and Support in New Hampshire and the World**

Most refugees lost family members through war, and some even described witnessing firsthand the murder of their loved ones; nevertheless, 83% came with at least one family member. Those that accompanied them most often were spouses (59%) and/or children (18%). Some came with a parent, sibling, or in-law. Many struggled to bring other family members to safety in the United States; by the time of the interviews most households were kin-based. Because of the high cost of housing as well as values that stress kin solidarity, some apartments contained extended families. However, 11% of those interviewed lived with roommates. Nonetheless, most of the households were relatively small, containing no more than four people including children; about one-third were bigger.

Most households (70%) contained children. The refugee families we interviewed were more likely to have children and generally had more children per household than other households in New Hampshire. This difference did not indicate that these refugees generally had large families at the time of arrival or during initial settlement, but rather that the local NH population has such a low rate of childbirth that it is not reproducing itself. Only one-third of households in New Hampshire have children and the average number of children per household is 1.83 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Two-thirds of refugee households had children present and the average number of children per household was 2.4.<sup>9</sup>



Therefore, we can conclude that, although the refugee families in our study did not have large families, on average they had more children to support on less income than non-refugee families in New Hampshire. Many refugees also had family elsewhere. Refugees reported family members remaining in refugee camps, stranded without support in their home country or other countries, living as refugees in Europe, or living as refugees or immigrants in other US states. It is very important for many refugees to hold onto these family ties. A male refugee describe his situation: “I call my parents in Cameroon every

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that 17% of the refugee households contained more than one family and that roommates or friends who shared an apartment to cut housing costs often had children.

week. Since they cannot read or write I cannot do the emails. I use the Internet only to communicate with my sisters and friends.” The sense of loss for family still in the home country or in the camps is very strong: “The only thing I am feeling is that I am missing my family.” Another refugee said, “I miss my friends and family in the camps. I don’t have any relatives to contact here.” Another female refugee said that she was “sickened with missing her family.” This comment was typical: “I miss my country but I don’t want to go back there. I miss my family. I’d like to see my mom.”

“I miss my country but I don’t want to go back there. I miss my family. I’d like to see my mom.”

In many cases, the refugees had the burden and responsibility of not only supporting themselves and their family in New Hampshire, but also assisting family members left behind who did not have sufficient resources. One refugee said that, “All my checks, all the money I get, I send to Africa... We can’t, we can’t forget our families in our country, because we know the life before we came here, how hard the life in Africa is, so, even if we are getting just a little we need to share with the others.” A refugee from Concord described a similar situation: “I believe that my coming here is something like a glory because I am able to make money so that I can support my family. I am capable – the money that I can make here... like the \$300 I send to my family and friends every month... That is why I like America so much, because I am able to work and support my family.” Of course, valuing and sustaining family is an additional burden. One refugee explained, “How am I going to pay my bills? I need to send money to Africa for my children, for school, for all these types of things.”

“My coming here is something like a glory... because I am able to work and support my family.”

#### **k. Further Education**

Many people expressed an interest in continuing their education. One refugee said that the “main reason to come to America was to become really educated.” Many of the refugees noted that learning more English and saving money for college was necessary for improving their job prospects: “I want to go to college so I can get a good job. And I want my son to go to college.” One respondent stated that he had wanted to come to the United States and get an education because he saw education as a way to stop war: He explained that “it was because of illiteracy that war came to my country.” But once he arrived he found it difficult to get the education he so highly valued. He said that he was “really worried about [getting] my education in America.”

Many refugees have faced perhaps insurmountable obstacles in obtaining further education. There has been a significant gap between their aspirations and their ability to acquire the level of English necessary for college admission. As one refugee said,

“I have plans to go to school. My volunteer went to the Concord Technical Institute. I went there to see whether it was easier for me to study there. But they discouraged me for the simple fact that I was not very technical in my English.” Many also did not realize how much education costs in New Hampshire.

“My main reason to come to America was to become really educated”

Employer interviews and previous research in Manchester indicate that support from employers can be key to refugees’ further education. In some workplaces employers provide tuition support and in others mentoring and advice. One refugee began in housekeeping and became a licensed practical nurse (LPN) with the support of the health facility at which she worked. In another instance, after learning English at his workplace, a factory worker was able to begin an associates’ degree in engineering by using an employer supported plan. If the student passed the course, the plan reimbursed 75% of the tuition and fees.

#### **l. Future Aspirations**

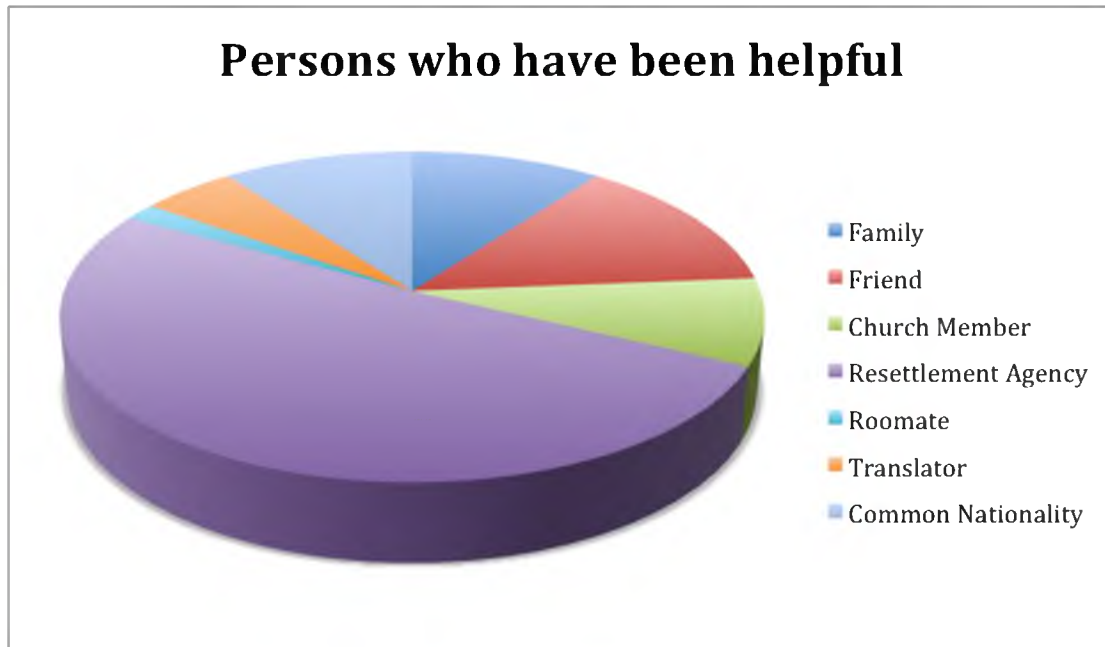
Refugees tended to aspire to three things: 1) gaining access to more education; 2) bringing family to the United States; and 3) becoming US citizens. Often English is considered the stepping stone toward

fulfilling all other goals. “First, learn English. Second, to solve the problem of our daughter. Third, to make better living conditions. I would like to finish college, but first I have to learn English.” Another refugee said: “I would like to have a job, take care of my family and I want my children to finish school and get specialization in a field. It will be good for them and this country.” A father said that in the future he wanted: “to be educated for my children, for them to go to school and also to go to college, and to develop for their lives.” Another respondent said: “I have two sons.... They have to be at least a dentist and a doctor.”

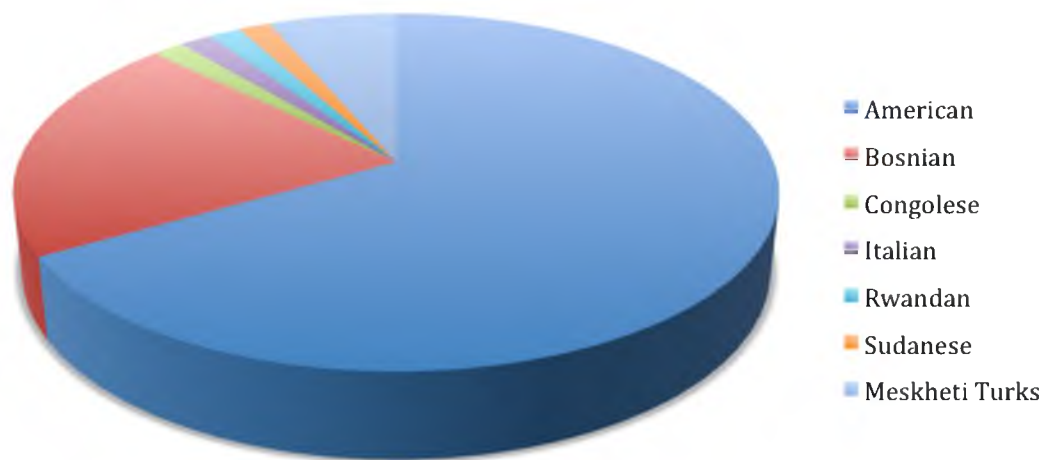
““I have two sons.... They have to be at least a dentist and a doctor.””

**m. The Kindness of Strangers: Neighbors, Volunteers, New Friends**

Help at the moment of trauma often came from neighbors or volunteers, rather than the settlement worker, whose mandate, time, and resources were limited. Sometimes these volunteers remained engaged. Sometimes, there were dramatic instances of the kindness of strangers. Most refugees have managed to settle with help from others; 93% percent of the refugees reported that someone had helped them, many of them strangers and almost all of a different nationality. More than half (55%) of those who helped were American. Only a handful were helped by relatives (8%). Only one person credited the resettlement agency, without giving the name of a worker. The rest named an individual whom they had not known before arriving.



## Nationality of persons who helped



In the settlement process, individuals who came as refugees and managed to learn English well enough to work as translators provided crucial information, services, and personal support. They were not paid or officially acknowledged for providing this assistance. In fact, the most frequently named source of support (17%) was one of the translators: “Whenever we need to ask, he helps us. He interpreted for us in the hospital. He is the first one we call, if we have a question, we ask him.” Another refugee said, “There is no space to say how much and what kind of help he has given us. We call him anytime, during the night.”

“She [volunteer] helped us in a lot of different ways. She was a problem solver for everything. We didn’t speak English, and even during the night we called.”

Overall, 40% of the refugees directly reported that volunteers helped them. The descriptions that refugees provided of the resettlement process indicated that actually the majority had help from volunteers. Churches (7%) played a role but were not as significant as the non-religiously affiliated

“Everything, Everything I need, everything! Even when I was sick, she [volunteer] would come to the hospital and we would meet there. Everything, everything! Every help I need.”

volunteers. Many refugees were assisted in activities of daily living. The volunteers and other helpful individuals provided information or linking services. One family reported they were given a baby shower. In Concord a refugee recalled, “He [a volunteer] went out and bought us food and tried to fix up the apartment for us. He went out and got us things whenever we wanted to buy something for the house. When he goes somewhere and sees something cheaper, he tells me and buys it for me. He also helped me get my library card. And this computer.” A woman

was helpful with matters of health and employment: “most of the English, we don’t understand it, so we call her and she helps us with paperwork. For the dentist, she’ll take us to the hospital. And we say, we want a job, so she helps us get a job and writes the applications and drops them off all over.” A couple said that a volunteer helped take care of their baby and “helped us get to the hospital and she has helped us shopping.”

Some of these volunteers were brought by the resettlement agency. The agency was required by its funders to recruit and train volunteers who could provide services beyond the limited types of support mandated by government contract. In both Concord and Laconia volunteers have formed volunteer networks, although the organization of the networks and the relationship to the resettlement agency differs in each of these cities. (See Part Three)

## PART THREE: COMMUNITY RESPONSES

The differences in size, history, and local political dynamics of Manchester, Concord, and Laconia have created different environments for refugee resettlement. The cities varied in the degree to which they were able to provide housing, employment opportunities, and social services including community centers, community health clinics, publicly funded and volunteer ESL programs, and immigrant based or oriented organizations. Moreover, with a longer history of refugee resettlement and more social agency involvement, Manchester has been in a position to apply and receive federally subsidized New Hampshire administered ESL programs and cultural competency training for the school districts. The three cities also differ in the presence of a surrounding metropolitan area, population size and density, and territorial extent, which affects how refugees are dispersed within a city and the degree to which they become visible community members.

Speaking about Concord, a former police chief noted the significance of these kinds of variations: “Folks that were refugees were not necessarily clustered in one area. They could be spread out in the city pretty easily. I think as a result of that there was less concern that, say, in this section of town there are all Somalis, or whatever it may be.”

**Table 5. Variability in Resettlement Contexts**

City	Size and density/sq mile	Square miles	Metro area	Housing scarcity*	Unskilled employment availability	Social services	EOL availability	Unemployment rate (2007)
Manchester	108,874** 3,290.	30	Yes	Scarce	good	some	some	3.9
Concord	42,392 657	64	No	Available	poor	few	few	3.4
Laconia****	16,950 853	20	No	Scarce	poor	few	few	4.1

\* In 2006-2007 housing costs in NH were disproportionately high in relationship to wages

\*\*Manchester 2007 <http://www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi/htmlprofiles/pdfs/manchester.pdf>

\*\*\* Concord 2007 <http://www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi/htmlprofiles/pdfs/concord.pdf>

\*\*\*\* Laconia 2007 <http://www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi/htmlprofiles/pdfs/laconia.pdf>

During the period of our research there were efforts in Manchester to bring together the various offices, services, and organizations that worked with newcomers but there was no public or private funding available to sustain this effort. Some progress was made in coordinating information about ESL programs in the city (<http://www.nhesl.org/>). While Manchester has had a greater variety of non-government organizations and city services, Concord and Laconia provided volunteer involvement in refugee support.

### 1. Volunteer Contributions and Voices

The gap in services in Concord and Laconia was compensated by a greater proportion of community volunteer efforts. However, these efforts were organized very differently in the two localities. In Concord, we found no overall coordination or communication among the resettlement agency, public officials, social service organizations and workers, or the Concord Multicultural Project (CMP), a volunteer refugee support committee. In Laconia, there was a high degree of coordination and communication; the resettlement agency had a direct relationship to volunteers who were part of a City

Council Committee. This committee, the Laconia Human Relations Committee (LHRC) was established by the Laconia police chief in 2002 and was co-chaired by a member of the City Council and a volunteer.

Some volunteers in Concord worked directly with the resettlement agency. Other volunteers in Concord found the stipulations with regard to confidentiality and professional distance from clients too limited for the kind of advocacy they felt was required. Consequently, they established CMP, which was independent of both the resettlement agency and city government. The strength of this approach has been its flexibility. The weakness has been that volunteers are not officially recognized, in part because of the informality of their support system. As a CMP volunteer explained, they did not have “rules and everybody kind of does their own thing.... The general barrier has been the confidentiality and just getting through that. There are some people in some of the agencies that welcome us and say ‘Please, yes, do this and we’ll be glad to help you’ and then there are other people that just say ‘Who are you? Why are you calling?’”

Both volunteer organizations serve as a hub connecting various services and local organizations to refugees. In Laconia, these connections are made systematically through bi-monthly meetings of a “Refugee Connections Committee.” Local volunteer organizations and government offices see these meeting as a chance to share and disseminate their cumulative experience in assisting refugees to become part of the local community. They felt that their local community was welcoming to refugees: “I find people in this community respond to the refugees. Almost every place that the refugees have taken an apartment, the neighbors are really helping them. That should just happen as it wants to happen.”

In Concord, the linkages organized by the volunteers happened more informally through personal networks of the CMP. For example, the Project’s volunteers included an ESL teacher in the school system who “knows everyone in town ... knows the stresses and benefits of the school systems, and can also speak eloquently about what people don’t have that they need and where Concord has done a good job.” Another member of the Project had long-standing ties with local recreational programs and ensured that the refugee children had opportunities to participate in local sports teams and summer recreational programs. Until 2008 he was able to obtain some funding for related costs such as uniforms and fees. He personally provided transportation to practices and games and covered many costs.

The LHRC also participated in a yearly festival, the Laconia Multicultural Market Day, dedicated to celebrating the presence of refugees and other international migrants in the region. The festival also allowed various social services including the library, mental health and the Red Cross, to provide information to refugees, immigrants, and the several thousand people who attend the event.

Although both organizations received small grants or donations, and there is corporate and public support for the Laconia Multicultural Market Day, volunteers have personally funded most of the assistance for refugees in both cities. As one volunteer in Concord explained, “People that wanted to help, just individuals giving money, was ... the main source of funding.”

#### **a. Types of Assistance Provided by Volunteers**

Volunteers in both Concord and Laconia reported intensive involvement with refugee families. While families often needed the most extensive types of support during their initial stages of resettlement, often the networks of support continued across the years. In some cases these relationships have evolved into mutual networks of social and emotional support and friendship. There were multiple routes to volunteering: formal connection through the resettlement agency, links made through LHRC and CMCP, neighboring, church, or local organizations such as the Rotary Club.

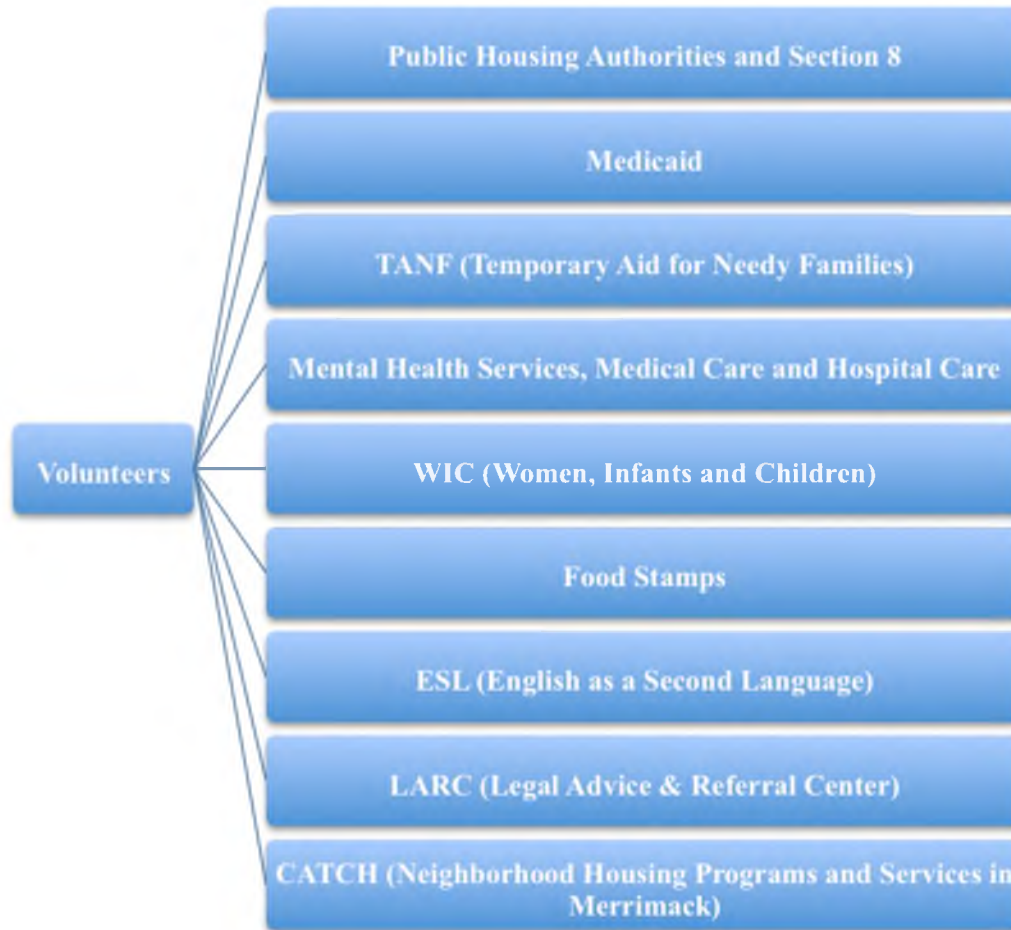
The kinds of supports that volunteers have provided are innumerable but can be divided into linking services and direct services.

“We don’t have guidelines.”

“The neighbors are really helping them.”



Linking services reported by volunteers:



Whether they provide linking or direct services, volunteers have faced a host of challenges. Very often volunteers have struggled to provide support when they do not have assistance from a translator: “I can remember the first family that I worked with, I’m looking at a Russian-English dictionary, because they spoke literally no English whatsoever, and then them trying to ask me a question, me in turn asking them the question, and just looking back and forth between pages and trying to construct the sentence, right? And it seems like they [social services] weren’t there to help. They weren’t like ‘user-friendly.’”

In the course of helping refugees, volunteers have gained firsthand exposure to the bureaucracy that encompasses impoverished people:

And then the amount of paperwork was just unbelievable and then we’d go in then they’d say, ‘well, you’re missing this one,’ and I’d say I did everything that you gave me, you didn’t give me that. It just, I don’t know, it seemed like it was very frustrating, and looking at it from the point of the refugee, if the refugee had to go in and do this themselves, they would have just not have gotten the service. And then consequently, they wouldn’t get food stamps or they wouldn’t get healthcare, or whatever the situation was. It’s not a user-friendly system for somebody who doesn’t understand the culture or whatever.

“It’s not a user-friendly system...”

Some volunteers have become direct advocates: “We’ve had people arrive with terrible dental problems and I ended up sobbing into the phone, screaming at a woman, and oh my goodness. This one woman said ‘we don’t want anybody who’s not interested in taking care of their teeth. Has he kept up with his dental work?’ I said ‘He’s from Afghanistan. They’ve been having a war, hello? Their house was

bombed.’ I said, ‘it’s probably kind of hard for him to get to the dentist.’ And his jaw was all swollen and red and he was practically in tears, and she said, ‘We can send you a new patient kit’ and I said ‘HE DOESN’T NEED A NEW PATIENT KIT! HE NEEDS A DENTIST!’”

Direct services provided by volunteers include:



The volunteers have often dug deep in their pockets to provide for their new neighbors and have learned much about the gaps in the safety net of US supports for low income people: “For those who have very little cash, we help out with paper products and diapers. Soap, sanitary napkins, stuff like that.” Soap and sanitary napkins are examples of items that food stamps will not cover.

Items that volunteers personally provide satisfy many needs and come from many sources; often, volunteers help children obtain items they need that are not supplied by the schools and also help furnish apartments:

One of the families I worked with had school age kids, so I went out and bought notebooks and pens and pencils, that sort of thing. I went out and got a new outfit for each one of them, and if they needed any particular thing, I would look to see if I could get couch donated or a chair donated. One of my families needed a new dining room table, because the one they had was pretty rickety, so a friend of mine who is a realtor had a table and chair set in the basement, so I went over and picked it up.

Volunteers have different philosophies about what to give and how much to give. Some gifts provide sustainability and allow for self-sufficiency. The strategy of providing bicycles followed by volunteers in Laconia reflects this outlook: “So we try to have everybody have a bicycle before they have a car so they can get around. It helps them enormously, not having to take them every place.” Some volunteers try to bring refugee households up to middle class living standards; other fear such assistance will set unrealistic expectations. An experienced volunteer explained her approach:

“Every volunteer is different.”

I help them with the essentials, like they needed, they don't have a washer and drier. They are washing everything by hand, and their landlord will only allow them to have an energy-saver washer and drier. Trying to find one of those, because that's relatively a new thing, is next to nearly impossible. So they were hanging up all of their clothes to dry, and of course if it's hot out, it doesn't necessarily dry if it's humid. So I got them a wooden drying rack. I don't want to encourage them to think that everything should be given to them. I help them out ... if they need something in order to have sustainable living. If you want something, you work towards earning it or whatever. Every volunteer is different.

Some volunteers have become specialists in satisfying certain needs, such as providing furniture or connecting refugees with networks, agencies, and churches:

I connect them up with furniture a lot. I'm constantly online, but what we do is I go into each home after [the resettlement agency] has found the basic stuff, and I talk to them a while and I meet them and I open their cupboards to see what they have and their bedrooms and I look at the beds, and they just have minimum, sometimes almost nothing on their beds, so then we furnish them. I put out a call to what we call Upstream Community. It's about 400 people who are in all of the social service agencies; the United Way connects them. And so you can tell people anything in this service. So I constantly put out and say this is what I need this week for the refugees. And then people email me back, so I spent a lot of time connecting people, getting furniture, last night it was a bicycle.

Securing large goods such as furniture requires not only donations but storage places and a truck for transport. In Laconia, a local church has provided storage and access to a truck.

The question of transportation runs through volunteer narratives of assistance. An underlying cost of volunteering is the price of gasoline: “So lots of gas, lots of gas,” one woman stressed in talking about the contribution of volunteers. She went on to give an example, “We took one of the families to see their parents in Boston. We have a family here whose aged mother and father live in Boston. His mother had a gastric ulcer and had to go to the hospital. And so we took him over there.” Another volunteer explained:

“Well, the resettlement agency of course takes them a lot of places to get all of their legal stuff done, but then they leave, and so we stay with them for as long as they need it, until they get cars. The Turkish community got cars very fast, but we have one Iraqi man who's getting a car, but otherwise we'll be staying with them for as long as they need it, so it's a lot of work to provide transportation.”

“We stay with them for as long as they need.”

Many volunteers spoke of driving refugees to doctor’s appointments or to hospitals. They make themselves available in case of emergencies. “We’ve taken people to doctor appointments. We took one woman to the hospital night before last. She fell and sprained her wrist.

Volunteers can also be crucial conduits toward finding temporary or permanent employment: “A friend of mine actually found a job for one person I was helping after about two months of looking. Another person I helped find a couple of jobs and they did well, but one job kept laying him off so I helped him to find another job, and he was able to keep that one.”

**b. Evaluation of the Main Obstacles Refugees Face:**

In trying to assist refugees, volunteers often mentioned some of the obstacles to easy settlement that refugees also identified:



Some of these obstacles are structural problems that speak to weaknesses in the New Hampshire economy that all residents confront: the growing reliance on low paying service sector jobs or seasonal tourist industry jobs and the high rents. An official noted:

So it’s very, very difficult in the Lakes Region to get a good-paying job. They are few and far between. The Lakes Region in particular has a lot of service-oriented jobs, which is typically 7 or 8 dollars an hour. And if you’re expected to pay a \$1200 rent payment, the rent here is just absolutely unbelievable. And then we have a lot of seasonality. You

“We need to create more affordable housing.”

can get a job in the summer time, but it's over in November, and then you've got the whole winter, and you've got to figure out what to do for work in the winter.... We need to create more affordable housing as well as to create a bigger workforce so that the jobs can come in, but they kind of have to be done simultaneously. So that can be a huge problem as well.

On the other hand, some problems, such as the inability to obtain recertification for foreign credentials, reflect the particular situation of immigrants and refugees. As one volunteer noted, "We have a man who is washing the floors in Wal-Mart, and I don't find anything demeaning about washing floors, but I'd like him to be able to practice medicine. And I know that if he had been in Canada, for instance, he would not be challenged that way.... This guy should be in a medical career, paying big taxes. We have him doing menial labor for the rest of his life."

"This guy should be in a medical career, paying big taxes"

### c. Refugees as Volunteers

While refugees have received assistance, they also have given it to newcomers. The volunteer support networks include volunteers both as part of the organized support efforts in Concord and Laconia and within the informal support structure that extends throughout the state. Sometimes volunteers who do not have refugee or immigrant backgrounds have worked to link volunteers together. The following account is an example: "One really neat thing is ... when you connect one refugee family with another refugee, as when [a Sudanese refugee] took [a refugee from another country] to the airport. That meant that he had to get up for work at 2 am and put in those hours, so that he could do the pick. You can't even get a bus from here to Manchester Airport now and a taxi would be eighty bucks." In this instance, the refugee who received the ride then went on to find others to help. As he began helping people from Nepal, he said to members of the volunteer organization, "You help people and you try to give things to people and I want to give them my computer." And he felt so good about that, so he went

"The Nepalese presented [the other refugee] with a Nepali hat"

with us to deliver his computer and an iron and an electric shaver ... because being on the receiving end, he knew what that meant. And then the Nepalese presented the [other refugee] with a Nepali hat.

Sometimes, a network of people from the same country or of the same language will develop. From these groups, people who are more established will help those who have recently arrived. Often, as we indicated, the refugees who have been hired as translators have gone on to provide assistance outside the strictures of the resettlement program. However, there are also examples of support and assistance in which refugees will help others from different backgrounds. A member of one of the volunteer organizations described how these casual encounters begin: "A Nepalese woman will be walking home from work and one of the African guys will see her and stop and they'll take her home." A refugee in Laconia reported that the person who helped her find a job was a Turkish woman whom she met on the street, stating that: "Everybody knows everybody." Another in Concord stated that another refugee "helped me to look a long time" for a job.

### d. Neighboring

"A Somali Bantu family moved in next door and we shared a porch."

Many volunteers have become involved in refugee support when they have reached out to help their neighbors. One woman told us: The way I got involved was, where I previously lived in my apartment, a Somali Bantu family moved in next door, and we shared a porch, and over the year we sort of got involved. There were needs that they had and they didn't have a volunteer at the time so they were trying to ask me if I could do things, which was difficult with the language barrier and finally I found out who brought them here and settled them here and I went and became a volunteer. This first family that moved in next to me.... I know these people. Through them I met other families, and likewise all of the other volunteers are meeting other

families through the refugees...There are individuals that take us to their houses and say this is a new family, this is a new family.

On some occasions, community members have joined the effort to assist refugees because they observed others doing the same:

We were carrying the computer, and a young American man stopped us as we were walking in and he said, can you tell me about these people here? So we stopped and talked and we ended up trading emails and he has a pick-up truck and he said 'I have a truck, so if you need help moving things...' call me whenever you need help. He's a structural engineer. Really nice guy

Other volunteers may have been introduced to one family through the resettlement agency or a volunteer network and have found that they are part of a refugee network of mutual friendship and assistance. Even if they have concentrated on a few families, they have found themselves drawn to helping others: "I mean I've had people come up my door and say can you please call and ask, this woman wants a job, will you call and ask if she can get an interview? You know, little things like that."

### e. Motivations and Frustrations

"I'm not doing it for recognition; it just needs to be done."

Since volunteer support is so crucial to successful refugee resettlement, it is important to understand why individuals volunteer. Rewards and public recognition were not the central motivator, although volunteers' efforts were certainly praise-worthy. Instead, volunteers responded because they saw that they could contribute in a meaningful way to a clearly identified need. A woman summarized the situation by explaining: "I'm not doing it for recognition; it just needs to be done." Or as another volunteer told us, "I just love the people and we just end up being friends and it's always interesting and you go to bed at night feeling like you at least gave a shot at making things a little better." Volunteers also are people who like people. As a woman who volunteers with her husband noted, "We feel just at home with everybody. Very seldom is there anybody we don't feel comfortable with immediately." Many volunteers find it exciting to work with people from around the world. Several volunteers spoke of loving to learn "about different cultures and different countries and there's a lot of nice people." Some are specifically drawn to the children: "I love the kids. I adore the kids. ... A big motivator, too, is the kids."

Naturally, volunteering also had its frustrations, such as "too much to do, inability to get the whole story, not enough money, conflicts with job obligations, and competition among volunteers for the affection of refugees." Volunteers consistently cited the inordinate amount of work that needed to be done: "There just aren't enough hours in the day and there's too much to do.... There are twenty things in one sitting you can do to help someone in an hour, and there are twenty issues that could come up."

Volunteers who work full time have found volunteering itself to be a full time job. The problem becomes, as one volunteer noted, "trying to keep my full time job. I've used up so much vacation time in bringing people places, and right now I've got two of my families going through divorces and I stood in the court houses waiting for paperwork." One effective solution is to recruit more help; indeed, several respondents described doing just that: "I've tried to get other volunteers to help with the families that I help too." However, this longer-term solution also requires time and labor. To adequately support refugee resettlement, a volunteer has to become an expert about a range of local programs, entitlements, and regulations. Often novice volunteers demand help from veterans. An experienced volunteer noted that some new volunteers "are constantly saying, oh, I don't know how to do this form, I don't know how to do that, I don't feel comfortable doing that. I think I felt like that four years ago, and I just learned how to do it, but you can't say that."

### 2. Employers

The employers we interviewed in Concord and Laconia had little experience with refugee resettlement but had nonetheless begun to participate in the process. In Laconia, a process of public, private, civic, religious and corporate networking underlies

"Could she fill this out? Could she read it? Could she understand it?"

employer involvement in refugee resettlement. A refugee from Africa who arrived relatively recently was hired by a local healthcare facility after the refugee's church assisted her with her application. A nurse who worked at the facility and was a member of the church connected the refugee with her future employer. Even in this circumstance, the healthcare administrator at first was reluctant to hire the refugee because of questions of language. Looking back on this hiring, the administrator recalled that there was:

a lot with skepticism ... Could she fill this out? Could she read it? Could she understand? Especially in this setting, when you're working with people, and there are a lot of things going on.... I wanted to make sure if she could understand English, and understand what we were saying.... Because in this type of business, you have to be able to understand... especially in housekeeping when they are using different chemicals, and you must know which chemical to use for what, and if you're going from one room, or we've got two residents in a room.... The [worker] must know ... who doesn't have an infection or who does."

In this situation, the administrator monitored the situation carefully and as a consequence developed a personal relationship with the employee. The applicant flourished in the job, studied to become an LPN and continued to work at the same facility. In the course of this experience, the administrator learned about the traumatic past of her employee and gained new respect for her:

I was trying to explain night sweats to her [and I asked] did she have night sweats? And she was like yes! And I said you did? She was talking about how now she has a blanket, because she used to dig a hole in the dirt in a place to sleep.... She was saying how they would go from bush to bush. She is a refugee ... getting to know her, knowing some of the background, I personally haven't gone through it, to really understand it, and I mean I see things in movies.

After gaining perspective from back story such as this, the administrator found new appreciation for the refugee's work ethic: "I see her every day, she works, she is somebody who has a great attitude, and just a just a great smile, just, just nice, I mean she comes to work every day, she is very reliable."

The experience also made her supportive of refugee resettlement: "I think it is great if people want to better lives and come here ... I think it's great, we could learn things from them, and they could learn things from us. And I am just a big fan of it." Consequently, this administrator thought that refugees such as the one she works with, as well as several immigrant nurses strengthened the local economy. "If working and buying products is a good thing, I mean they are here surviving like everybody else, you know. Having a place to live and find what they need ... is a help to the economy. if they are productive and want to work and want to help, why not?"

Refugees often fill jobs that are classified as unskilled and are considered undesirable because of temperature extremes, difficult physical labor, or risk of physical assault—as with refugees who work in detention centers for violent or emotionally disturbed youth.

**"If they are productive and want to work and want to help, why not?"**

Increasingly, however, these jobs require considerable math, English, and literacy skills. Some employers have found innovative ways of hiring people with limited English that can ensure that the new employee learns on the job and gains the necessary and considerable skills it takes to do a job such as cleaning in a health facility. One hospital manager described pairing cleaning staff who do not speak English with "buddies" who speak both English and the newcomers' language: "And that works quite well."

The skills needed for relatively low-paid "unskilled work" were emphasized by a plant manager who hired refugees: "The paperwork is real critical. You need to sign off on the specs." In this case, questions about English competency brought high-level managers directly in contact with the refugees.

Instead of using, you know, the language as an excuse [not to give them a job], we got a hold of the church, and had them come in there. I guess two of the guys were ... taking the English as a second language course. And from that meeting it's like, jeez, you guys do speak better; you do understand more than we thought you did.... I guess ... maybe they were embarrassed and maybe they thought their English wasn't that good. See we don't see a lot of it. And through this meeting we saw they were able to speak and communicate a heck of a lot better than they had shown up to that point. And it was going ... pretty good. So, I said, great, let's move forward and start training them.

However, in this case the two men soon left to obtain higher paying jobs than the \$11 an hour they were offered for third shift work in physically taxing conditions. One of these workers left to enroll in a training course to obtain a license for driving large trucks. The plant manager told him that if he secured the license, the plant would hire him.

”Jeez, you guys do speak better, you do understand more than we thought”

Many seemingly small factories in New Hampshire are currently part of vast multi-national corporations and manufacturing facilities located both globally and throughout the United States. In some cases, local managers are part of corporations that have extensive experience in hiring non-native speakers of English and are therefore open to the challenge. A regional manager responsible for a New Hampshire facility spoke of his experience at a plant in Massachusetts, explaining that “It’s really a potpourri of people from Vietnam, to Ecuadorians, to Lebanese . Russians ... Albanians. It is like the United Nations.... It seems to work fairly well, I mean, you know, there are a few of them in management positions. Right down through maintenance and through our production team. So it seems to work pretty well.”

In some instances these corporate networks bring immigrants to New Hampshire. In one instance, Russian scientists and engineers were brought to New Hampshire and then redistributed to facilities in other parts of the United States. These types of international connections and recruiting experiences may make higher level management more open to employing refugees. However, these attitudes don’t always translate into significant employment of refugees. In one such internationally linked firm, three refugees had been hired; a second firm reported hiring only one, although in both cases management gave very positive evaluations of these workers:

He actually came through the temp agency that I use. And, he’d done a number of assignments and done very well, but they were all short term, temporary. Then we were looking for a person who could do wire-winding, which is really our most entry-level job. And had nominal expectations. His English at first was a little rough; he didn’t have a lot. So he went on for about two years. He’s become quite fluent and he’s excelled at what he does. He’s begun working in assembly part-time. And he is going to night school now to get a – an Associates in engineering.

In the case of this worker, the manager also became directly involved during the first few months when language was an issue. The manager worked with the volunteer in order to explain the paperwork and procedures that accompany permanent employment such as direct depositing of checks and medical and dental benefits. Again, the administrator was willing to take the extra step because she had found that refugees and immigrants -she was uncomfortable making the distinction- were valuable workers. “I think they’re good. They bring a different work ethic... particularly for entry-level jobs. They’re just thankful to have a job, and they’re not looking to be the vice-president of communication within six months.”

Employers also showed some willingness to provide flexible conditions to keep refugees working in jobs that otherwise would be difficult to fill: “Sometimes it’s tough to get people that can, or that want to sit down and do the same thing over and over again. But some people really want that for work. One guy had to bring his mother to work. He asked if it was okay to leave at 4:00. You know I start at three, leave at four, I’ll be back in twenty minutes. I was like, yeah, absolutely, if that’s what you have to do, it’s not a great thing you want to have people do, but it’s something that he had to do to make his life livable and that’s fine too.” The hospital human relations manager reported they supported staff who attended English classes: “We’ve provided, or we’ve supported some staff here through them. Well, you know, make sure that they got them. We haven’t had it as classes on site.”

### 3. Religious Involvement

Refugees include Christians, Muslims and Hindus and they vary in the degree of religious intensity and commitment. There is a mosque in Manchester but not in Laconia or Concord and there are no Hindu temples. Consequently, non-Christian refugees have sometimes moved to be closer to co-religionists and the kind of community support they can provide. At the same time, a wide range of churches and church-linked organizations participated in refugee resettlement efforts in the state in a



variety of ways. Many see welcoming refugees to NH as part of their Christian mission. “They need to know that from a Christian perspective that they are loved here, that they are welcome here, that we want them to be part of our community, that God loves them just like he loves the people that have been here their whole lives, and it’s our obligation to reach out and be proactive in doing that.” However, as indicated above, only seven percent of the refugees in our study reported receiving assistance directly from faith-based organizations.

In some cases, the official resettlement philosophy of short term assistance followed by termination of services made it difficult for a congregation to assess how much continuing assistance to give. As did the community volunteers, pastors and their congregations have struggled to find their own approach to welcoming refugees in the context of the resettlement agency’s “sink or swim” approach. In one such case, a religious congregation provided additional furniture, utensils, and food but was puzzled about whether rent assistance was needed. The refugee urgently requested assistance; the resettlement agency said it was not needed. The pastor decided to take the lead of the resettlement agency: “I think what was happening was that the resettlement agency was trying to help them realize that they need to quickly get on their feet themselves. They need to kind of take hold of their lives and get a job and become responsible. And, so, they would cooperate with the landlord, letting him put pressure on [the refugees by threatening eviction].”

Sometimes, however, the resettlement agency has worked directly with faith-based organization to obtain funding for a desperately needed support service that would extend beyond the initial eight months of federally based support. In one case, the resettlement agency and a Christian organization obtained a pilot grant to develop a drivers’ education program for refugees. The Christian organization was willing to work with “All faiths and atheists. We don’t discriminate. Whoever has needs, that’s who we work with. Jesus didn’t ask for applications. We don’t either.”

However, as with other initial volunteer efforts, the churches and faith-based organizations have faced the twin obstacles of initial inexperience and subsequent burn-out. The members of these organizations have begun without a clear understanding of what kinds of services were available to refugees, what kinds of programs had been piloted before, and what other organizations and networks engaged in assisting refugees had been doing with volunteer projects. As is the case with other volunteer efforts, church organizations have begun over time to recognize that many of the barriers that refugees face in New Hampshire are those that confront low-income families. However, as with the volunteer organizations, religious organizations alone didn’t have the resources to compensate for problems in transportation, health care, housing, and education.

“Whoever has needs, that’s who we work with. Jesus didn’t ask for applications.”

Religious leaders that we spoke to particularly stressed the problem of transportation. One religious activist commented that “the public transportation system ... affects everyone. If you don’t have a car, it’s impossible to get around here. Finding work, for example, you can only find jobs that are in walking distance, or if you can find some alternative means of transportation. Going shopping, how do you get from A to B with all of your groceries?”

#### 4. City Officials / Police

“They still are taxpayers, they’re still entitled to service from the city.”

The city officials interviewed included members of the city councils and present or former members of the police in both Concord and Laconia. All the city officials in our study provided very strong support for newcomers in their cities.

They tended not to draw distinctions between refugees and immigrants. A city council member explained that rather than newcomers demanding too much from the city, the challenge was to convince them that government could be helpful to them: “the problem that they bring is lack of understanding of what government can do for them... because a lot of them have come from places, where they had oppression.” Officials emphasized that the newcomers were taxpayers in order to stress that these newcomers had rights and contributed to the economic well-being of

the city: “A tax payer, could stay behind that door, be anything they want to be, but they still are taxpayers, they’re still entitled to service for the city. [Refugees] are no different than we are, and even if they rent, they pay taxes because the landlord charges them for that. They’re all tax payers, believe me.”

City officials emphatically stated that “there is no influx of crime because we have an influx of people you know.” They noted that some refugees “have been victims of crimes, just like anybody else in the general population here. And some of them have been arrested, but nothing that is unusual or out of the ordinary.”

Police in both cities had been proactive in reaching out to newcomers because they were aware that many arrive having experienced tremendous violence and abuse from public authorities in their homelands. In Concord, as a part of mutual education efforts, members of the police department held panels with refugees. A former police chief in Concord described these efforts as follows:

They [refugees and immigrants] wanted to introduce themselves and their story to give some perspective as to where they came from, how long it took them to get here – especially for the refugees it was really an eye-opener because it had taken years, in some cases, to end up in little beautiful New Hampshire. We had hoped that as a result of those conversations they could go back to their peers, family members, and say: *you don’t have to be afraid of the police*. To that end I think it was pretty successful because I think both sides felt good about what happened.

In Laconia, police have visited newly arrived refugees in their homes, although they are aware that “some of these people are very, very fearful of authority figures, people with badges.” Consistently, lieutenants have met with families, assessed their language skills, met with the volunteer coordinators about their issues, and have informed all the officers about their presence and any problems the family might have been facing.

“Places where we have problems before refugees came around remain problematic.”

Both city council members and police were very careful to indicate that problems arising during refugee resettlement came from issues of poverty and population density, not from the refugees themselves or their cultural differences. They argued that: “places where we have problems before refugees came around remain problematic, like some of our lower income problems, and that had nothing to do with resettlement of refugees.”

However, the lack of experience of NH officers with people of diverse backgrounds can create problems on both sides. According to one police chief, educating his officers is challenging on both ends. On one hand, the cultural competency education his officers receive makes them more certain in approaching refugees. This is a positive outcome because uncertainty can lead police to overreact. On the other hand, police officers risk making broad generalizations: “the danger ... is stereotyping, that if they’re black that means they must be this. There are a lot of what-ifs. ... In a weird way [the cultural competency education] could’ve added to some of the confusion.”

In Laconia, a leading member of the police force both continued official support for volunteer efforts to assist in refugee resettlement and served as a volunteer. This police officer assisted a refugee by teaching her how to drive. The Laconia police force has been proactive in preventing possible hate crimes: “We’re aware of the fact that there may be problems as far as possible hate crimes, prejudice, things like that. We tell [refugees] that we want to hear about any ... crimes against you if they happen. Thank goodness we haven’t really had it – we’ve been pretty fortunate.”

However, there were some underlying problems. City officials including the police struggled with the question of obtaining adequate translation. The police in Laconia had created an informal system of translation using refugees as volunteer translators. One officer described the system as follows: “If somebody wants to report a stolen bike, or something like that, or they have an issue – just any other issue – [they call these volunteer translators]. These people... would come meet us and help us out and translate with a victim or whoever it is and the officer.” In certain situations the Concord police used translators from the language bank. However, the former Concord police chief told us “If we had a victim of a crime, it was really on us to make sure we were investigating it the right way. If it’s someone we arrested, it really was never enough of an issue to say we want to get someone in here interpreting this. So, then once you’re in the court system, the court can provide language services.”

While we have no official statistics, our interviews indicate that neither city has hired many immigrants or refugees as public employees – including the police force. A former Concord police chief recalled hiring one Bosnian refugee and one Hispanic employee.

## 5. Newspapers and public opinion

Local newspapers have increasingly covered refugee-related issues and debates. Their interests have reflected and intensified certain concerns about and images of refugees. Newspaper reporters find themselves reporting about refugees in a situation where certain misconceptions about refugees remain current among some of their readers: “I don’t think the numbers of refugees using welfare services is particularly high [yet] every time we run a story about refugees we get letters to the editor from people saying they are taking our services or they’re taking our money, or you know, that kind of thing. .... Just about every time we write something, someone writes a letter to the editor that is very negative. That’s part of why we’ve done stories is so that people get a better understanding of...so the people know what is actually happening.” From the perspectives of a Laconia journalist, there were some differences between Concord and Manchester and Laconia. This journalist noted “on the whole they [immigrants and refugees] are welcome” in Laconia. This is the case despite the fact that “there is less infrastructure, less public service available for families, even low income, not just immigrant and refugee families.” This journalist argued that “it seems kind of contrary, but that in a place where there was less diversity or small community, they are welcomed and they acclimate quicker than if they go to a big city and there [are few] neighborhoods.” We should note that some of those who worked with refugees in Concord felt that their city welcomed newcomers.

“In a place where there was less diversity or a small community, they are welcome”

Although, as indicated above, refugees come with a wide range of educational and class backgrounds and experiences with modern technology, public attention has been focused on the refugee populations that arrive with the fewest skills and the greatest need for services. Concerns about illiterate people arriving without knowledge of urban life surfaced in New Hampshire with the arrival of people known by resettlement workers as “Somali Bantu.” As a reporter noted, “I think there has been a more concerted effort to do coverage of refugees probably in the last 3 -4 years, really I guess, since the Somali population has arrived, which has been one of the more challenging things for the community.”

In general, however, reporters have profiled a wide range of individual refugees and highlighted their struggles, courage, successes, and their efforts to settle. One reporter told us:

They might be having a hard time financially or finding housing, but I think that they are making relationships here that are rooting them a little bit... just giving them a basis of community here. That doesn’t mean that they still don’t have other challenges. I know churches, a lot of the refugees have become connected with their churches, and that their churches become a place where they go for support, and also I know that the churches really embrace them fully and really love what the folks bring to their congregation.

The reporters have themselves been influenced by these stories and their encounters with refugees. Their experience reflected those of volunteers and most other community members we interviewed who have helped refugees. Most of those who have had the opportunity to learn about the struggles of refugees start to see them as members of the community and to value their presence. While the reporters we talked to spoke of refugees adding to the quality of life by adding to the diversity and culture, they also noted that “they are working towards being part of the community and assuming leadership roles.”

## 5. Summary: Attitudes of New Hampshire Respondents to Refugees

We found an openness to newcomers from almost everyone we interviewed including journalists, employers, and local officials. When asked whether the refugees had changed their city, most of the twenty-six people interviewed thought that refugees had a positive effect or were too few to have any effect. One former city official said, “I do think that they’ve changed Concord for the better, largely. I think that you look at the school system and then you look at the diversity that’s there, and I think that the

kids who go to Concord schools may have a different experience now than they would 15 years ago there. I think that's a noticeable change." Another local official, also addressing the challenges newcomers posed to a local school system, said "I don't think we've had a lot of significant issues. I know the challenges for people in the schools are great, but overall, as a community I don't think it's a terrible thing by any stretch."

Some volunteers and officials felt that others in New Hampshire who did not have the direct experience of refugee resettlement might not understand the importance of welcoming refugees. Although some of the volunteers felt embattled and overwhelmed by the needs of the refugees and the lack of sufficient public support, most did not assume that New Hampshire residents were opposed to the newcomers: "It's not that people look at [refugees] and say 'I don't want them here,' It's [rather that] people look at them and don't understand that they need to be welcomed."

When arguing the case for refugees, many who were involved in the resettlement process stressed the positive work ethic the newcomers bring with them. A human relations manager told us that from "what I've seen with many of immigrants, they have a deep respect and almost awe for the United States and see work as almost a gift. And I think that that gives a message to those of us who've been residents of the country for a long time, it helps us to understand and appreciate more what we have... And I think that it enriches the work force."

Most of the respondents noted that refugees contributed to the increasing diversity of the community. When they used the term "diversity," they were not stressing cultural difference as expressed through different foods, dress, or language, but rather the enrichment of the community values in general. They noted that refugees were contributing to a revitalization of the positive valuation of work, family, kindness, and reciprocity. The former police chief said:

I personally love to see a more diverse community. I think it's one of the things that makes America a great place is the diversity factor... I just find it incredibly interesting to know that folks have gone through so much to get where they are. I just have the ultimate respect for what they've been through because I didn't have to do that. And so I'd like to think that all of this newness that has come to us in a different way will, over the test of time, be shown to have been a good thing.

However, those in local communities engaged with refugee resettlement also struggle with questions of justice. Overwhelmed by the many needs of the newly arrived refugees and the pressures that an increased number of poor people place on scarce resources such as housing programs for low-income families, they wonder if their local community can sustain more new arrivals. As one volunteer stated: "the community really doesn't have enough services to support [so] I wish that fewer refugees would ... settle in Concord. It's hard enough for the people already here to find what they need and find jobs and ESL and babysitters."

Despite the scarcity of jobs and resources in New Hampshire, most of the people we interviewed in our community survey people did not feel that the solution was simply to limit refugee resettlement in the state. They also believed that people who work in the United States should be able to become citizens. As one plant manager said, "If people want to come over, I guess that they should be given that right. And if they can do that, then if what they want [is] citizenship then they should be able to get it."

At the same time, our researchers found that even those who worked with refugees had very little knowledge of US immigration and refugee policies. They tended to accept the misinformation disseminated through the national debate about undocumented workers. This includes the mistaken information that those who want to enter the US need only legally apply and wait their turn. They tended not to know that only a few categories of people are eligible to permanently migrate to the United States, that many people who come as immigrants (documented or undocumented) may have fled from oppressive conditions as fitting the UN definition of refugee. There was little awareness about how difficult and expensive it now is to convert legal residency to citizenship status. No one in the community survey was aware that many refugees and legal immigrants increasingly find themselves in a legal limbo, working and paying taxes but not being able to gain full citizenship rights.

It is important to point out that the participants in our community study did not dwell on a legal concept of citizenship. In fact, a few considered citizenship not so much a legal status but a process of

public engagement and contribution to the general welfare. These respondents defined a citizen as “a person who contributes, and helps, and participates, and is engaged, is engaged in their community.” Or as another respondent noted, “You can live in Laconia and be a citizen of Laconia.” Many respondents were deeply committed to building a sense of local community defined in terms of mutual responsibility and contributions to the common good; they therefore valued those newcomers who became active participants in local programs of mutual assistance and engagement.

Most of our respondents offered two complementary answers when discussing whether, in the light of scarcities in services and employment opportunities, New Hampshire has benefited from refugee resettlement. First, they believed that welcoming refugees strengthens New Hampshire’s social and moral fabric. The resettlement process allowed residents of the state to reaffirm their common humanity by engaging in the acts of kindness that make us human. In taking this position, these respondents built on their understanding of their own family history and the unheralded immigrant history of many of New Hampshire’s towns. They also contributed to a vision of New Hampshire as a place of supportive and welcoming local communities.

Secondly, many respondents thought refugee voices served as the proverbial canary in the coal mine. Shortages in services for refugees have helped to identify and publicize problems that all low income people, and increasingly all NH residents, face in trying to build a decent life for themselves and their families. The people we interviewed believed it was important for everyone’s good to address the scarcity of well-paying employment in the state, the high cost of housing (linked to a reliance on property taxes to fund state services), and the lack of sufficient or affordable transportation, daycare, and higher education. Rather than separating refugee problems from other challenges to local communities, they pointed out that after a few months most refugees start to work. They pay federal income and social security taxes and the high rents linked to property taxes. Therefore, refugees, together with other working families, have a right to question just what local communities receive from these taxes. Together with other residents of New Hampshire, refugees hope that their struggles and sacrifices will contribute to an increasingly just and more equitable society.

#### **Part Four: Study Recommendations**

- 1. Federal funding to resettlement agencies should be significantly increased so that case management and emotional support is available throughout a year-long settlement process.**
- 2. Policies of abandonment after a one month period of settlement services and eight months of minimal federal supports should be replaced with an ongoing support system oriented towards sustained self-sufficiency.**
- 3. Refugee employment should remain a priority.**
- 4. Settlement agencies should be provided with long-term funding to provide an integrated program of accredited English language instruction linked to the practical application of English skills including driving lessons and applications for green cards.**
- 5. Accredited affordable driving instruction should be made available as part of federal resettlement funding in localities with no or minimum public transportation.**
- 6. Free legal assistance should be provided to assist refugees and immigrants in applications for permanent residence, family reunification, and citizenship.**
- 7. Experienced translators should be funded to provide ongoing social and emotional support.**
- 8. Community volunteers need recognition as a vital state resource through funding and technical**

support for internet communications networks including Facebook-type pages and interactive blogs for information sharing.

9. Using its status as the first primary state in the nation, New Hampshire should lead the way nationally by launching a public education campaign to provide the general citizenry with accurate education about US immigration laws and the procedures for getting citizenship. Citizens should be aware of the current barriers set by US policy for immigration, asylum, acquisition of permanent residency and legal citizenship.

10. The re-credentialing of skilled and professionally trained refugees should be facilitated.

11. Refugee needs should be discussed as part of the overall challenge to the state to provide basic services to its residents including: health care, public health services, public transportation, and adequate public education from elementary school through university. These services should include:

(1) The number and types of employer-supported further education programs should be increased through public-private partnerships that give tax credits for employee tuition support and mentoring.

(2) Discount passes for public transportation should be available for low-income families.

(3) Local governments should establish automobile purchasing networks for low-income people linked to donation programs and community minded used car dealers.

(4) Both inter-city and intra-city bus services should be increased throughout the state.

(5) More public housing and housing assistance programs such as section 8 should be made available in localities throughout the state where the private housing market cannot accommodate low-income families.

(6) Health care should be available to all.

(7) Increased funding for public education at all levels; increased access to affordable higher education and technical training.

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