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# Cultivating Community: The role of the Winooski school system in creating positive relationships between city institutions and the refugee population

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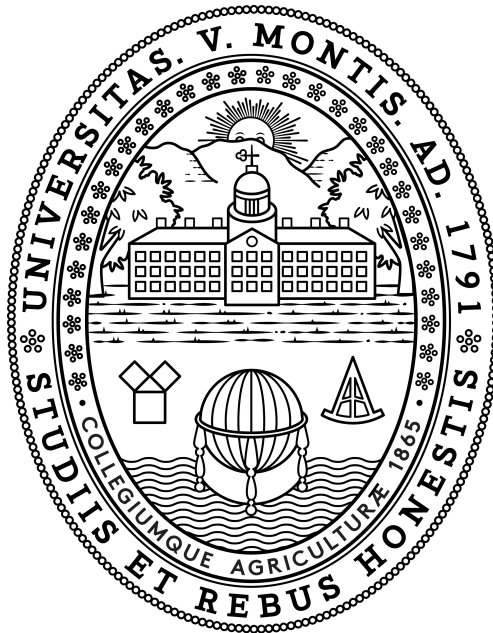
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**Cultivating Community: The role of the Winooski school system in creating positive relationships between city institutions and the refugee population**



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April 21, 2017

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Abstract**

Schools serve as key institutions for absorbing newcomers into American society, as they provide resources, programming, and access points into a community for immigrant children and their families. In Winooski, Vermont, the public school building serves as a center for support and engagement for the refugee population, offering a variety of services to children and their parents. As demographics shift to include more foreign-born students, schools need to rethink classroom strategies and ways of engaging with families that best navigate cultural divides. My findings suggest that Winooski can be viewed as a model city for bridging the cultural divides inherent in refugee resettlement: various community institutions, in collaboration with the school system, provide services and support for refugee families, and the school serves as a center for support and community engagement. These processes can be examined through the social network concept of multiplexity. Put simply, community members know and trust each other in several different roles, increasing the capacity of the community to support one another and generate trust. At the center of this social network are the multicultural liaisons, who play a critical role in supporting refugees in communities, and enhance this network of trust. The research presented here highlights the unique processes in place that make Winooski a successful site for refugee resettlement, and recognizes the work of those in the community that dedicate themselves to increasing the level of acceptance and cultural understanding throughout the district and the community as a whole.

## **Introduction**

### Relevance Today

In today's political climate, this research feels more important than ever before.

According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, referred to as USCRI, nearly 60 million people in the world today have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Less than 0.1% of this group will get the chance to begin a new life in the United States (USCRI 2017). This research focuses on the experiences of the lucky few who were able to find safety and protection for their families; there are still so many around the world without this chance, and this research is dedicated to them in the hopes that one day they will find themselves in safety, supported by communities who can apply these research findings to improve their ability to offer support. As DB, the Somali-Bantu multicultural liaison for the Winooski school district, explained at a school board meeting, "we did not want to be refugees;" rather, the communities these individuals lived in became so dangerous that they were forced to leave their beloved homes in search of safety and opportunity. Resettlement was the last resort, not the first priority.

### Why this Research?

According to findings by Rong and Preissle, schools serve as "the most important social institution for absorbing newcomers" (2009:5). Schools provide resources, programming, and networking opportunities, allowing them to serve as access points into a community not only for immigrant children, but for their families as well. Due to the rising number of immigrant children in American school systems, an increase of literature surrounding the pedagogy for effectively teaching these children is emerging; Rong and Preissle, for example, provide suggestions for outreach efforts schools can attempt in order to better provide resources to the

communities they serve. These suggestions include working with community organizations (2009:53) so that schools can provide for their communities both as advocates and as centers of resources and opportunities.

Harvard Professor Natasha Kumar Warikoo explains that as demographics shift to include more foreign-born students, “schools will need to rethink classroom strategies, family engagement practices, and how to best navigate cultural divides” (Tamer 2014). Additionally, Warikoo explains that “the more that teachers can see their immigrant students as assets, the better off all students will be. Immigrant youth bring rich, diverse cultural backgrounds to the classroom and expose their peers and teachers to different ways of understanding the world” (Tamer 2014). The research clearly emphasizes ways in which to successfully and appropriately incorporate immigrant youth into a classroom, as well as the benefits of doing so; my question soon became, how well are these concepts being applied in the small city of Winooski, Vermont?

Based on the statements of many of Winooski’s community leaders, Winooski can be viewed as a model city for refugee resettlement. Various community institutions, in collaboration with the school system, provide services and support to the growing local refugee community. This caught my fascination while volunteering at the J.F. Kennedy elementary school in Winooski; unlike the elementary school I attended, which was predominantly white, middle-class, JFK’s classrooms are incredibly diverse. And, yet, the students work together with seemingly no acknowledgement of the differences between them and their peers. What is going on in Winooski?

First, I explored the demographics of Winooski, trying to determine who was living in this tiny city. Next, I studied the school system to understand the systems and supports in place for students while in the building, as well as for their parents and families. Finally, I broadened my search to include other community organizations working in association with the school district. Ultimately, I hope this research explains the unique processes in place that make Winooski such a successful site for refugee resettlement, applauding the work of those in the community that dedicate themselves to acceptance and cultural understanding. Additionally, I hope to highlight ways in which other districts can model themselves after Winooski in order to provide the level of support and care to their refugee populations that Winooski offers its residents.

#### Who are Refugees?

As defined by USCRI, a refugee is “an individual who is outside his or her country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion who is unable to, or owing to such a fear, unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country” (Immigrants 2017). There are nearly 20 million refugees around the world, and over 10 million of these are children. Families seek refugee status and resettlement as a final resort after all efforts to return home, or settle permanently in a country of asylum, have failed. Gaining this status is not an easy process, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) only refers about 1% of all refugees for resettlement in a third country (USCRI 2017).

#### Refugee Resettlement to Vermont

When a refugee is resettled to Vermont, they come through the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), one of 8 USCRI field offices. Resettlement to Vermont began as



private sponsorships long before the existence of VRRP, with refugees sponsored by various groups and organizations. After the Refugee Act of 1980, resettlement landed under the Department of State. Currently, USCRI is just 1 of 9 voluntary agencies with which the Department of State contracts. In the past year, 386 refugees were resettled to Vermont. Refugees came from around the world, with the majority in 2016 resettled from the Democratic Republic of Congo (73), Somalia (80), and Bhutan (218)(VRRP 2016).

### *Why Winooski?*

There are certain criteria that a site must meet before refugees can be resettled there. These criteria include, but are not limited to, the availability of safe and sanitary housing, available employment, access to social services, and community support. Winooski offers all of this; there are employers in the area that depend on New Americans, a bus line that provides easy access to employment, social services, community resources, and readily available and affordable housing. According to Amila Merdzanovic, the director of VRRP, the reaction from the community has been supportive overall. “For the most part,” she explains, “people in this area have been very welcoming and we’ve always had volunteers—hundreds of volunteers—working with us, people wanting to host, employers...so I would say overall the experience has been very positive and welcoming.”

### City of Winooski Information

The city of Winooski, Vermont consists of only 1.43 square miles, and is home to 7,193 residents as of 2015. Although the foreign-born population in the state of Vermont is only 4.3%, the foreign-born population in Winooski is nearly 3.5 times greater, calculated to be 14.5% in 2015—this number is changing constantly, however, with the arrival of new refugees (Bureau 2015). Additionally, 15.3% of the community speaks a language other than English at home.

Winooski also houses a large low-income population, as 26% of the community lives in poverty. Winooski can be looked at as a model city for its inclusivity of the refugee community; Merdzanovic notes that “Winooski is leading the way in many aspects.” When asked why, she explains, “refugees are in the planning. It’s not an afterthought. Refugees are not the afterthought, but they are thought of and included in thinking about programming or whatever it is.”

#### *Winooski School District*

The Winooski School District enrolls approximately 850 students; these students are split into 3 schools—one elementary, one middle, and one high school—housed within one school district building. The JFK Elementary School, which was the particular focus of this study, enrolled 466 students as of 10/1/15. Much like the demographics of the city, the Winooski School District houses many students from both refugee and low-income backgrounds. 73% of students in the school district qualify for free/reduced-price lunch and around 35% of the student population transfers out or into the district each year. The students in the district represent 27 nationalities and speak 19 different languages; 30% of these students receive ELL services. To address some of the needs of this distinct community, Winooski hires a number of multicultural liaisons to assist the refugee population in the district.

## **Methodology**

### Family Literacy Project

Throughout this project, I worked as a research assistant for Professors Cynthia Reyes and Shana Haines on a study entitled, “Examining the Complexity of Literacy Brokering Within Immigrant Families and School/Community Partnerships.” Data was collected for this project using a multiple-case embedded case study design (Yin 2009); each case was a family unit, and each embedded unit included the experiences of the children, their family, their teachers, and any literacy brokers they access, such as school multicultural liaisons. Families were identified for this study using purposive sampling (Maxwell 2013), a deliberate process which allowed us to identify any families who arrived to the US less than 3 years ago and have children enrolled in the local public schools.

### Data Collection

The research for this study took place over 6 months, and consisted of interviews with open-ended protocol (see appendix 2) and classroom observations. What started as a study of an elementary school quickly grew to be a case study of the whole Winooski community. At the beginning of my research, I thought I knew the right questions to ask in order to get the information I was seeking; I quickly realized that this deductive method of research would not be effective to this study. Rather, the initial interviews I conducted led me to more interesting and authentic hypotheses, and eventually led to the conclusions presented in this paper.

A common critique of case study is that the research is constrained by that one case, and the case is too specific to apply to other such cases. As sociologist Michael Burawoy explains, “the extended case method...seeks to uncover the macro foundations of a microsociology” (1991:282). Micro-societies, such as the refugee community of Winooski, do

not exist apart from society, but rather are shaped and impacted by macro forces of society. Using extended-case study methodology, therefore, individual cases can be used to better understand other related processes. Applying multiplexity, a social networks theory that examines our understanding of the ways in which individuals are connected to each other in many contexts, allows for this research to be relevant for other cases of network structures. It is having this theoretical connection that allows my case study research to be generalizable and relatable. As Buroway notes, “the importance of the single case lies in what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases” (1991:281). The ultimate goal of this research, therefore, is to define the social significance of the information presented, and then to apply these findings to more general case studies.

In total, 47 interviews were conducted as part of the Family Literacy Project. These interviews can be categorized as 20 family interviews, 10 interviews with children, 7 interviews with teachers, and 3 interviews with multicultural liaisons/cultural brokers. The first set of family interviews were conducted during the fall semester and the second set of interviews will be carried out in late spring in keeping with the iterative process (Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway 2007) that was used for this study. For my specific focus on Winooski, I conducted 7 additional interviews with community members, school administrators, and teachers in the school. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, according to the preferences and comfort of the interviewees. Some examples of interview spaces include the home, the school, and some public spaces throughout Winooski. A generous grant from the University of Vermont Office of Undergraduate Research allowed me to compensate the individuals I interviewed, in order to compensate them for their time, and thank them for sharing their stories with me. As

Richard Shweder explains, “the knowable world is incomplete if seen from any one point of view, incoherent if seen from all points of view at once, and empty if seen from nowhere in particular” (2003: 2). My study attempts to “overcome incompleteness by staying on the move between different points of view or frames of reference. Its aim is to achieve that view from manywheres” (Shweder 2003:6). By speaking with as many community members as possible, I hope to apply Shweder’s perspective on understanding, and to present a realistic analysis of the relationship between school and community from the view of *manywheres*.

### Interpretation

Interpreters were present at all interviews with refugee families, regardless of the family’s level of English ability. The presence of an interpreter allowed families to speak in detail about their experiences without worrying about their capacity for effective communication, as well as increased the level of trust between our research team and the interviewees. As interpreters come from the same cultural group as the population for whom they interpret, these individuals served not only as interpreters, but as cultural brokers to help explain practices and traditions. Their interpretation abilities also allowed for the process of triangulation, as we could check information between families, children, and the school to distill the most authentic response as to what was happening in the school/community partnership for refugee families. Interviews were transcribed, as well as back-transcribed; the use of double-transcription for interviews involving translation allowed for the research to remain rigorous. Back-translations were always completed by an individual who did not serve as a member on the research team, in order to eliminate potential bias. Additionally, a member of the research team not involved in the interview process read each transcription while listening to the interview recording to ensure accuracy and completion.

### Vulnerable Population

Working with such a vulnerable population required vigorous protocols submitted through the IRB. One precaution that came from such documentation is the use of a second interview conducted with each family; in addition to follow-up questions used for clarification, a few questions were asked about the feelings each family member had after the first interview. The themes of these questions included feelings about the interview situation itself, as well as any thoughts in the time following the interview. This process gave the family members a degree of control over the research process and their involvement in the study; involvement of interviewees in the research process seeks to minimize the potential of abuse of power relations that has been cited in the research on refugee studies (Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway 2007).

### Interviews

Through the Family Literacy Project study, 10 families were interviewed from the Burlington and Winooski School Districts. For each family selected for the study, multiple interviews were conducted: a full-family interview, an interview with the children in the family, an interview with the focus child's teacher, and an interview with the cultural broker the family uses. For this particular project, I focused on the 2 families interviewed from the Winooski School District, including the teachers and cultural brokers connected to these families. Focusing on the experiences of one Somali and one Nepali family allowed me to focus on both the children and the parent's experiences with the school system, without learning only about the experiences of one ethnic community. As Winooski is such a small city, I was interested in exploring the opportunities for community engagement offered through the school, as well as the ways in which participation with the school leads to involvement with other city institutions

and resources. As part of the process of informed consent of the Family Literacy Project, families were informed they would remain anonymous. All other individuals interviewed were asked for their consent to be mentioned in this paper, and everyone was given the opportunity to decide how they wanted to be named in the paper. Most individuals interviewed were comfortable with their name being used, another individual preferred to be noted with his initials, and families interviewed are not identified by name. This information is synthesized and reflected in appendix 1.

### Theoretical Framework

It has been argued that participant observation as a method is both incapable of generalization and too focused on the macro level of society. A 1991 piece by Michael Burawoy challenges these assumptions and argues that participant observation serves a crucial role in sociological research. As Burawoy explains, “the macro world is not a real world but a construction of participants enabling them to negotiate and uphold face-to-face interaction” (1991:272). What is important in understanding society, according to this theory, is understanding the relationships and connections between the people that make up such a society. Additionally, participant observation serves to “break down the barriers between observer and participant, between those who study and those who are studied” (1991:291). Gaining the trust of the individuals discussed in this paper meant first gaining trust and acceptance by the greater community; this was accomplished by attending various cultural events, festivals, celebrations, events held for parents at the school, and more. I believe that the outcomes of this research would not be as strong were I not able to gain this level of familiarity and friendship with leaders and members of the refugee communities. As Alan Touraine argues, “it is not a matter of applying the knowledge of the expert but of the observer

joining the participants in a joint movement of analysis and action” (Burawoy 1991:283). As the individual capable of giving voice to those that I interviewed, it was crucial to remember that the interviewees were the experts on their own lives, not me. My role as a researcher in this setting, therefore, was not to objectively collect notes on what I witnessed, but rather to play an activist role and empower the community with which I was collaborating.

Ethnographers “recognize that both sides have theories about the other as well as about themselves;” the process is therefore a “collaborative enterprise of participant and observer” (Burawoy 1991:291). In this paper, I tell the stories of refugees in the community in the hopes that others can learn from their experiences. I believe that I learned more from the participants in the study than they could learn from me; as Burawoy notes, all parties have theories about each other as well as themselves. I, like all researchers, entered this study with my own biases and understandings of community, culture, and the world. Although I tried to shed these biases at every opportunity, and truly immerse myself in the lives of the interviewees, everyone interprets the world around them differently. Truly listening to the stories and experiences of the refugee communities within the school system allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the role the schools play for these refugee families—not just what I believed they are offering. It is important to note my own limitations as a researcher, however, because what I present in this paper is my representation of what I learned, and has been impacted—however subconsciously and subtly—by my perceptions of the research.



## School

### Introduction to the Winooski School System

The Winooski School District works not only to make the school a safe and welcoming place for students, creating the type of learning environment that fosters growth and new skills, but also to incorporate families into the school community. According to Winooski Superintendent Sean McMannon, “being a refugee resettlement site brings that beautiful diversity, [but] it also brings complexity to the school system.” Dr. Sonia Nieto explains, “the most common understanding of multicultural education is that it consists largely of additive content rather than of structural changes in content and process” (1994:7); as such, she presents a model representing the levels of multicultural education support that a school can offer its community. Ranging from monocultural education and tolerance at the low end of the spectrum, to respect and affirmation, solidarity and critique at the highest end, Nieto’s model allows for an understanding of how “curriculum, interactions among students, teachers and parents and other examples of attention to diversity are either apparent or lacking” (1994). Based on this model, Winooski certainly reaches a high level of success in offering appropriate and effective multicultural education. Differences among students are respected, language disparities are addressed, and teachers become learners right along with their students.

One way that the Winooski School District communicates with parents about school policy, happenings, and decisions is through School Board meetings. These meetings, held each month at the school, are also taped for future viewing by community members by Channel 17 or Channel 16 (ReTN). At one recent meeting, Superintendent McMannon explained the “All Are Welcome” campaign currently active in the schools and the greater community, in order to engage school parents in the dialogue. This campaign, symbolized by two hands holding a dove,

is a sign of a safe, welcoming and inclusive community. The school wants all families, regardless of country of origin, to understand that they are never alone, and that this Winooski community wants them and supports them. Similarly, the school is taking action to respond to the January 2017 executive order passed regarding immigration. Using school resources, Winooski communicated to all families what the order meant and what it did not mean. In this instance, the Winooski schools served as primary information sources to ensure that families in the district are receiving accurate news, and the support that they need to handle any stress this order has caused. A translated letter was sent to New American families, and an FAQ page published by the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP) was translated into 14 languages and dispersed throughout the district. Additionally, Winooski school leadership met with the Vermont Islamic Society leadership to demonstrate Winooski's continued dedication to two-way communication regarding the concerns and actions of the community. Due to the recent political happenings, these school-based efforts are greatly appreciated by refugee parents and community members who look to the school as a main source of both information and support.

#### ELL in Winooski

In an explanation of what a school district should do to be inclusive and support refugee students, such as getting all materials translated, hiring people who speak the languages of different groups, and meeting families where they are at, director of VRRP Amila Merdzanovic notes, "I'm saying what's important but they are already doing it." In order to effectively teach its refugee and New American populations, JFK Elementary School offers a variety of English Language Learner (ELL) options and classroom setups.

### *Multicultural Liaison Involvement*

During school enrollment, the parents and a multicultural liaison will have a conversation about the children being enrolled. From this very first interaction with the school, the multicultural liaison is working to support the parents and the family, interpreting the information into an easily comprehensible form for each parent. Depending on the educational level of parents, sometimes this means simply translating from English into a native language, and sometimes this requires more in-depth conversations about schooling. Although materials about classroom options are written up and translated, oral conversations are more common, as many families are not literate in their first language. This not only empowers the parents and allows them to have a positive first interaction with the school, but also ensures that the student will be placed in a classroom set up for their success. If students have had some schooling, families may believe they know in which grade their child belongs; however, grades are arbitrary from country to country, so it is important to find the appropriate classroom based on a student's age and educational background.

### *ELL Programs*

One option offered to families is the newcomer program available for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade ELL students, as space permits. This option is available for students who test below a 2.0 on the English Language Proficiency WIDA Standards, the screener used in Vermont to assess ELL students for appropriate placement. This newcomer program focuses on early literacy and numeracy skills and basic English acquisition, as well as teaches students how to be students. As many students in this classroom have never sat in a formal classroom before, basic knowledge such as when it is appropriate to leave the classroom, how to raise one's hand, etc., is crucial to successful school performance in years to come. Outside of the newcomer program, there are 3

ELL teachers (K+1, 2+3, 4+5) that fulfill a combination of pull-out services, push-in services, and co-teaching services. Pull-out services involve an ELL teacher removing an ELL student from the mainstream classroom to provide additional support, whereas in push-in and co-teaching services, the ELL teacher provides additional support in the mainstream classroom alongside the mainstream classroom teacher. Director of ELL and Curriculum Kirsten Kollgaard explains that, as math is very language-based, it is serviced at every grade level as a push-in or co-teaching model. Kollgaard also explains that English, however, is a pull-out model to allow ELL students to have “sheltered English content classes to help develop their English skills...extra phonetics and reading work...and developing content and background knowledge.”

Nancy Devost, the teacher of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade full day newcomer classroom, explains that this class is structured like a mainstream classroom with the addition of an ELL vocabulary workshop. This class becomes a “good community of learners,” and the space offers them a comfortable and safe environment in which to take risks with their learning. Devost believes that students are more willing to challenge themselves in this environment, surrounded by other peers just beginning to learn the language as well, than students might be when placed directly into a classroom of native-English speaking peers. Kollgaard believes in these newcomer programs as well, and wishes that there could be more classrooms like this to offer content skills in a sheltered way to a greater number of students. As supported by Devost, these learning environments allow students to develop language and content, while being supported, until the students are ready to join a mainstream classroom setting. In an ideal world, Kollgaard would offer a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade newcomer program as well, as “even by 1<sup>st</sup> grade, it becomes so academic that there are big gaps...and I think it would be also socially and

emotionally...really helpful to provide a space where they could learn procedures and everything.” It would also be beneficial to have one ELL teacher for each grade, as opposed to one ELL teacher for every two grades; this set-up would provide more co-teaching and pull out support to students placed in mainstream classes.

Many refugee children are placed in mainstream classroom settings as well, where they receive support both from the teacher, and from an ELL teacher for certain subjects. A benefit of this mainstream classroom setting is the reminder to all children, both native and foreign-born, that there are cultural differences and similarities between all of them; according to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher Lisa Goetz, the diversity of her classroom “opens their eyes to the big world out there and says, we all came from somewhere.” Research conducted by Sean Loewen supports this finding, suggesting that a diverse classroom setting nurtures the “development of the capacities of all students to function with intercultural knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity”(Hamilton and Moore 2004). Furthermore, Goetz comments on the unique feeling of acceptance in the school, explaining that “whether they’re wearing a hijab or speaking another language, the kids are so used to that, and they see them eating foods from their countries and it’s just natural. It’s just part of our day.”

Much of what makes Winooski’s ELL population different than the majority of the ELL students throughout the rest of the country is that a large number of these students are categorized as SLIFE students. SLIFE is an acronym used in this context to refer to students with limited, interrupted, or no formal education. Inconsistent schooling in various countries and settings, such as the experience of students from war-torn areas who are forced to flee to refugee camps for safety, creates a population with a different set of needs than other ELL

students. According to Kollgaard, SLIFE students first need to learn and understand early literacy and numeracy skills. Because of this added need, she believes that for ELL teachers in Winooski, cultural sensitivity and flexibility are the most important traits to have to meet students' needs.

#### Winooski School System & Parents

The Winooski school system's interactions with refugee parents do not end at the initial registration meeting. In addition to the regular check-ins and meetings with the multicultural liaisons, which will be discussed in detail in a following section, many programs and meetings are in place in order to incorporate refugee parents into the school community, and to teach them about experiences, policies, and procedures in place in the district. One such opportunity is the "learning walk" led by Superintendent McMannon. These walks are held by invitation for each ethnic group individually, along with that language group's multicultural liaison. As they walk through the school, Superintendent McMannon explains the US education system, including Winooski's recent proficiency based graduation system, as the multicultural liaison interprets and further explains. Additionally, parents are given the opportunity to see classrooms, ask questions, and even have lunch in the cafeteria with their children. This increased understanding of the functioning of the school is meant to allow parents to feel more connected to what is happening within the school building each day, as well as to give them a sense of empowerment based on this new knowledge of the American school system.

Another opportunity for refugee parents to get involved in the school system are the Parents as Educational Partners (PEP) workshops offered twice throughout the school year. Originally this was a weekly class that met specifically to build awareness about the public school system, teach parents how to call in to the office if their child was sick, etc. This program

has morphed into a workshop model led by ELL teachers from the school district, supported by multicultural liaisons and interpreters, and is effective in communicating information to parents that they might otherwise not know to look for. The fall workshop, for example, covered understanding a report card, the HEART (an acronym that stands for: honest, engaged, appropriate, responsible and timely) initiative prevalent in the schools this year, and what to expect from a parent teacher conference. In the past, parent technology classes have been offered as well; these classes taught parents the basics of technology, such as how to create and check an email, as well as specific online sources for staying involved in their children's schooling. There is also a parent meet-up group held by a counselor from the middle/high school; this group has transitioned into a support group for the Bhutanese-Nepali community to talk about parenting adolescents who are transferring between two cultures. Tul, the Nepali multicultural liaison, also supports this group, serving as a cultural broker between parents and the leaders of the workshop.

Biannual conferences are also an important opportunity for conversations to happen between parents and teachers with the support of an interpreter. As many refugee families either cannot read or do not understand the report card, these conversations allow parents to truly discover how their children are doing, both academically and socially. In Winooski, there is a 97 percent attendance rate for New American families at conferences—this is a better attendance rate than that of the mainstream population. Kollgaard believes that this may be, in part, because the liaisons do the personal outreach of contacting refugee families, setting up the schedule for them, and then calling to remind them as the conference comes closer. When explaining the role of ELL teachers, Kollgaard explains that she often considers them to be

“part-time social workers.” When parents come into these conferences, rather than asking about grades and school behavior, they often say things such as “my child won’t listen to me at home.” In these cases, the refugee parents look to teachers for guidance about appropriate parenting conduct, as many discipline practices used back home would result in legal consequences here in America.

#### Winooski Schools & The Community

As families interact with the school every day, the school provides wraparound services for families, and serves as a space to connect with other resources. Superintendent McMannon is dedicated to focusing the center of learning for Winooski on wellness; one factor of this wellness approach is ensuring that Winooski’s school children are receiving the level of nutrition and types of food they need to engage fully in a school day. The Vermont Foodbank comes every two weeks with fresh produce for community members; as many of the families who receive this produce are parents at the school, being able to pick this donation up at a location they already visit makes things easier. There is also a backpack program provided to 95 students, which allows low-income students to take home canned, nonperishable food items each Friday to eat over the weekend. Additionally, breakfast is provided in all classrooms each morning to ensure that all children can begin their school day with a meal.

The school also provides opportunities for community engagement. Last year, for example, a New American Education Day was held in collaboration with the city police. The event took place on a Saturday—in the hopes that even working parents would be able to attend— and included a talk from school ELL teachers, a question/answer session with the police about how U.S. laws are different from those back home, and a discussion with the city leadership about different resources available to New American families. The past two years



there has also been a New American family field trip in the summer. The first year was a ride on the Stowe Mountain Gondola, and last year was a ferry ride across Lake Champlain. As Kirsten Kollgaard explains, “that’s just a really nice community event to have. A bunch of our New American families connecting with school personnel, connecting with each other, and just having fun.” These opportunities allow for experiences that refugee families would not be likely to access without assistance from the school as they are difficult to get to and require money better spent on essential items and costs. These events are important, however, in providing families the opportunity to engage with their new home state and all that Vermont has to offer.

## **Multicultural Liaisons**

### Introduction to Multicultural Liaisons

In an article entitled “Do You Know Where the Parents of Your Children Are?,” school principal Hugh McKeown writes of the importance of incorporating all parents of the school system into school conversation and dialogue. He explains that “most of the time, we send invitations to all parents to come to the school. That’s the fairest thing to do. Everyone has the same opportunity. We don’t even think of group dynamics. The dynamics of first meeting in a group with which we can identify racially, ethnically, linguistically or by faith are quite different than meeting with a cross-cultural group of people with diverse backgrounds. *It’s an issue of power*” (2002:87). After having little success with the attendance rates of parents from various ethnic communities in the district, McKeown hired an interpreter for one parent meeting with a particular ethnic community—the results were tremendous. Parents attended, participated, and shared crucial information for the school administration to understand. As McKeown explains after the meeting, “It wasn’t so much that we had said they couldn’t talk with us, it was just that we hadn’t created the climate in which they could” (2002: 88).

Winooski is able to hire five multicultural liaisons to serve as cultural brokers between ethnic groups in the community and the school, and to create a climate in which all students and their families are able to participate fully in the school community. Originally this was possible through School Impact Grants, but because the multicultural liaisons are so critical to the functioning of the school, most of the expenses have since been moved into the Winooski School District’s operating budget. Having these school employees to stimulate conversations all the time, not just at certain parent meetings, allows for refugee and non-English speaking parents to engage equally in the school community alongside the native English speaking

parents. Tul (Nepali), DB (Somali-Bantu), and an Arabic multicultural liaison are full-time employees of the school district, and Lan (Vietnamese) and a Burmese multicultural liaison are part-time employees. In working with multicultural students and their families, Director of ELL & Curriculum Kirsten Kollgaard notes that cultural sensitivity and awareness are key; the addition of the multicultural liaisons to the Winooski School District allows for greater success with this sensitivity and awareness, in interactions from parent teacher conferences to full community events, and everything in between. According to Superintendent McMannon, these district liaisons “do everything;” Kollgaard agrees, explaining that “we absolutely couldn’t do our jobs without them. They do so much.”

By speaking with Superintendent McMannon, direct supervisor Kollgaard, and the liaisons themselves, it quickly became clear that these individuals truly do it all. The official role of the multicultural liaisons is to support effective communication between home and school, yet these hard-working individuals are fulfilling a number of additional roles for the school and for their communities than what is expected of them at a baseline. From the very first interaction families have with the school, the liaison is there, providing interpretation during registration to ensure a smooth transition, and to assist in completing all required paperwork. After this initial meeting, the liaisons support children from their communities throughout the day by interpreting, tutoring, and supporting in classrooms. Other tasks these individuals perform for the school include translating all written documents, providing interpretation services for students, parents, and community members, and otherwise supporting students and their families as they adjust to life in Winooski.

### Functions of Multicultural Liaisons

A large function of the multicultural liaisons has become to provide support to parents from the community. As DB explains, “if an interaction has to happen, we are there.” These interpretation services offered by the liaisons are vital not simply in language brokering, but in cultural brokering as well. Both Tul and DB see their role as helping the community by building trust between the families and the school. As such, the work of these multicultural liaisons also includes a lot of work with families; these relationships with parents are so important that the multicultural liaisons view helping parents as the priority, even though they are employed by the school. Parents show up at the school at all times of the day, and call the multicultural liaisons on their personal lines as well, for help with anything they might need. Multicultural liaisons often spend large portions of their days helping with outside paperwork such as food stamp applications, bills, medical forms, citizenship paperwork, and more. Although these individuals are hired to improve communication between home and school, Kollgaard explains, “we definitely don’t draw the line with, well, no, your school can only help with school forms.” “It would “be a disaster without them,” Superintendent McMannon explains, as they “become the...really trusted individuals.” The multicultural liaisons hold a high position in their ethnic communities for serving as the brokers between home and school—a major institution with which each family must interact—, and very few (if any) interactions occur between the refugee communities and the school without the assistance and support of their multicultural liaison.

The role of the multicultural liaisons is not only to assist refugee families in understanding the American school system, but also to educate classroom teachers about cultural differences between the U.S. and their ethnic communities. Just as the multicultural liaisons explain and defend important differences, such as the lack of corporal punishment in

schools, to the parents of their community, they must also explain these differences to the teachers. Teachers are better able to do their jobs when they know the expectations of the children in their classroom and the parents of these children, and can therefore work to navigate cultural differences. One tension noted by many parents throughout this study related to the different practices of feedback from teachers in the U.S. as compared with teachers in their home countries. In America, parents note, the teachers always say that the student is doing well and everything is fine. One concerned parent informed us in an interview that a homework worksheet was returned to their child with questions answered incorrectly, yet a positive message and high grade at the top. Parents are concerned with their children's progress and want them to succeed in school; never criticizing students, in the beliefs of these parents, means the children will not improve. The multicultural liaisons play a critical role in this cultural brokering between parents and teachers, explaining the expectation of parents from their cultural backgrounds and assuring teachers it is acceptable and encouraged to be honest with parents about academic successes as well as weaknesses.

Superintendent McMannon explains that the multicultural liaisons also “communicate with bigger things...and then they act as a real ambassador out in the community. Whether they're at the mosque, whether they're at the community center, whether they're on the soccer field; just answering and talking about school, what's going on. And then they also bring that back to us.” DB further explains this role, explaining that he sees families all around in the greater Winooski community, which increases the trust [these community members] have in him.” Many of the refugee parents have limited or no formal school experience themselves, which makes supporting their children in an American school system even more challenging. It

is crucial, therefore, to have a trusted individual to assist them in navigating this complicated new system, and support them in finding a way to actively participate in the academic lives of their children. As members of the ethnic groups that they support, Tul, DB, and the other multicultural liaisons can not only effectively explain what is going on in the school system but also provide cultural brokering and support to community members and school personnel alike.

The multicultural liaisons also play a part in communicating with leaders from their communities about specific needs of the different ethnic groups; after learning about discrepancies, challenges, or confusions, the liaisons either report back to the school with the information themselves, or encourage community leaders to engage with the school and share their needs. One example noted by School Board President Michael Decarreau occurred in regards to days off given for religious holidays. In a city as diverse as Winooski, there are many different holidays being celebrated, and there cannot be a day off from school for each one; however, students from the large ethnic communities would be absent from school to celebrate major holidays anyways, and the school board felt they deserved an official day off to observe these important days. By communicating with multicultural liaisons and community leaders, the school was able to give a day off for a major holiday to each of the major ethnic communities. Having time off for these different holidays could encourage a discussion and an understanding of these days, as well as the cultural groups that celebrate them. Superintendent McMannon notes, however, that this educational opportunity has not yet been capitalized on as a school community. The role multicultural liaisons play both in cultural brokering and in language brokering for their communities is critical, and the Winooski community is stronger and more cohesive because of it.

## **Explanation**

### Social Networks

Within the study of sociology exists a study of social networks, the ties that bind people and communities together. An influential piece by James Coleman describes various types of social networks; an open structure cannot combine forces to provide sanctions, whereas a closed structure provides for collective sanction. The consequence of a community with social closure, therefore, is a “set of effective sanctions that can monitor and guide behavior” (Coleman 1988: S107). Put simply, existing in a community in which people know each other provides for an internal system of checks and balances—a parent, for example, learns about the behavior of their child from another community member, who has relationships with both parent and child. Open networks do not support accountability, because not everyone in the network knows one another. Closed networks, on the other hand, provide accountability to everyone within the system. Not only do these closed social networks support community relationships and offer a set of sanctions on behavior, but also the closure of social networks is important for building communal trust (Coleman 1988). It is easier to trust the functioning of the community when you know the community members in various roles and believe that you all have the same needs to be fulfilled by societal institutions; open networks have a decreased capacity for trust due to a lack of connections between community members. The small size of Winooski, Vermont and the closeness of the ethnic communities it contains allow for the closure of social networks in the city. Additionally, the small size of Winooski means increased opportunities to see and engage with other community members. Commenting on the Winooski community, Decarreau explains, “I think what we’re seeing...is there’s pockets in neighborhoods where people will definitely interact if they happen to be close.” The small size

of Winooski makes these seemingly minor interactions between neighborhoods possible and common, and they make an impact on the neighbors involved. “I think it’s the simple things,” Decarreau explains. “Going out for a walk and saying ‘hi’ and watching big smiles when ‘hi’ may be the only thing they know. But the big smiles. It’s nice.”

### Multiplexity

In addition to the discussion of closure comes Coleman’s explanation of multiplex relations. This idea comes from a 1967 work by Max Gluckman, who explains that in such relationships, “persons are linked in more than one context (neighbor, fellow worker, fellow parent, fellow coreligionist, etc.)” (Coleman 1988: S109). The city of Winooski certainly exhibits such multiplexity, further contributing to its network of social closure. Many of the refugees living in Winooski work at the same factories together each day—they ride the van to work, work side by side, and ride the van home. They walk to their homes from the van, joining their children and other family members. Many of their children are in the same classes, and the parents attend school functions together. They see each other in their ethnic and religious communities, whether attending an event of the Somali-Bantu Association, the Green Mountain Bhutanese Organization, the mosque, etc. They know each other’s children, play soccer together in their spare time, and shop at the same halal grocery stores. These ethnic communities are intertwined due to close proximity and a shared need for social services—whether they choose to or not, individuals become linked in more than one context.

As Gluckman’s definition elaborates, the central property of these multiplex relationships is that they “allow the resources of one relationship to be appropriate for use in others” (Coleman 1988: S109). Knowing people in more than one capacity allows for a greater sense of community; if two men in a neighborhood play soccer together on Sunday afternoons,



and their children are in the same classroom at school, one man might feel more comfortable asking this neighbor for a ride to the mosque when his car breaks down. Sharing communities such as the school and mosque with this neighbor allows the man to trust his neighbor more, trust the institutions with which they both interact more, and generally engage more with the community. This is happening all over Winooski. Since the school is the institution with which parents interact daily, many of the relationships within the community begin here. As parents begin to form relationships with other parents, they realize that these are the same individuals they see while shopping for rice at the corner market and waiting for the van to go to work, and who teach their children in the Nepali weekend classes.

Multiplex relationships do not exist solely within ethnic communities, although these relationships may be closer as they have more institutions to share. As Decarreau noted, all individuals in Winooski may see each other walking down the street. Additionally, they may watch their children play soccer together after school, perform in the same concert on a Friday night, and wait for the bus into town side by side on a Saturday. The more these relationships are noticed, the more they can be encouraged to grow, and the closer the social networks in Winooski will be. An additional benefit of multiplexity is the ability to increase social capital. As Coleman explains, social capital can “be found outside as well as in the community consisting of the social relationships that exist among parents, in the closure exhibited by this structure of relationships, and in the parents’ relations with the institutions of the community” (1988: S116). The more people you know, the more you increase your networking abilities, and the more you can engage with your community.

### Multicultural Liaisons

The discussion of multiplexity and closure of social networks in Winooski revolves around the multicultural liaisons. As members of ethnic communities as well as employees of a central community institution, these individuals play a crucial role in the functioning of relationships. Community members begin to trust the schools because they trust their multicultural liaisons. The liaisons, in turn, increase this trust by serving as leaders in their ethnic communities. As DB relates, he sees families at the mosques and around town, and keeps talking to people even when their children have aged out or left the school system. Refugee families trust DB because not only is he one of them, and as a result understands their battle, but also because he understands the American system. They see him on the soccer field, at mosque, and at school, and he begins to tie the different communities together, increasing social networking and forming multiplex relationships within his community. The continued contact with the institution that multicultural liaisons provide encourages a culture of trust among the ethnic communities, providing them with the resources they need to engage with the school, and, from there, with other institutions. Without the multicultural liaisons, it is likely that refugee families would not interact with the school, and therefore not engage with the rest of the community and form the relationships that are so crucial to social closure.

## **Community**

### The Winooski “Vibe”

The current Winooski demographics are not reflective of Winooski’s history, although they do appear to be a good indication of its future. As various community members have explained, Winooski has a new “vibe”, representative of the diversity moving quickly in to the community. While the majority of Winooski’s residents are welcoming of this new refugee/New American migration into their community, it is true that some members of the community are moving out as the demographics of their neighborhood shift around them. Research conducted by Murray suggests that “due to the potentially negative (albeit small) impacts on native educational outcomes, native families may respond to increases in the foreign-born population in public schools by seeking alternative educational opportunities” (2016: 270). The findings of this study continue to explain the white flight from diversifying neighborhoods, stating that “it may be that native households prefer a more ethnically and racially homogenous peer group for their children, and are therefore more willing to relocate” (2016: 270). As Superintendent McMannon explains, there was a period of flight noted among some white families from the school system, mainly families with educated parents occupying Winooski’s middle class. These families often stayed through their children’s elementary school years, and then left to seek education in a different school system; these parents wanted their children to have experiences with diversity, but sought an educational experience they considered more academically challenging, and more focused on their child.

As explained by various community members and leaders, however, the majority of the residents of Winooski are here to stay due to this increased community diversity, and the unique experiences afforded to them by this diversity. Superintendent McMannon notes that at

least some residents “have a choice. They don’t have to live here...they have resources. They could send their kids to different schools. But this is where they want to be and they want to see it get better and you have to have those kinds of people in a community to help raise everyone up, otherwise it’s a really, really uphill battle.” Not only are families already in Winooski staying to play a role in shaping their ever-changing community, but new families are moving in for these exact reasons. As School Board President and lifelong resident Michael Decarreau explains, “I think that we’re seeing...and we’ve talked to the younger people, they’re moving in because they want to see the diversity. From the newer families moving in, it seems like...what they’re seeking out is exactly that diversity and having their kids understand how to work with it.” The Children and Family Programs Manager for the City of Winooski, Kirstie Paschall, also mentioned this point. Many families in the community, referred to by Paschall as “legacy families”, have “either stayed here, moved here, or want to be here because the New American populations are here; it’s important to them.”

The diversity of the Winooski school system offers its children an opportunity to interact with different cultures, and to understand that, at the end of the day, people are people. Nurturing the next generation to be accepting and tolerant is just one benefit of a diverse school experience. For Michael Decarreau’s children, for example, hearing stories from some of their peers, with different backgrounds than theirs, had a “big impact on their ability to see things for what they—not see things for what they are, but not assume that they are what they are because of something they made up.” As third-grade teacher Lisa Goetz explains, differences among children are not only based on their ethnic and cultural backgrounds—

another lesson learned by children in the school district. Goetz approaches her classroom from the perspective that “kids are kids.” Rather than seeing “oh he’s from Somalia, or he’s from Nepal,” she explains, “I just teach, and I know that they’re all different no matter if they’re from here or there or anywhere.” These important lessons about cultural understanding, and the importance of not generalizing a group’s experience to individuals, are just some of the lessons gained as a student in Winooski.

The children in the Winooski school system are not the only ones positively impacted by the opportunity to work and learn with a diverse group of people. Paschall feels that Winooski is “unique and a model for the rest of the country,” adding that Winooski is “proof that a lot of what is being said in the world comes from ignorance and lack of experience, and that we are a perfect model for all of the arguments that people are trying to make with data.” By teaching children about acceptance from a young age, and offering the entire population opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds, Winooski is an example of how diverse communities and school systems can benefit all members of the community—especially children—in a variety of ways. The residents of Winooski present not just diversity of race and ethnicity, but diversity of religion, socioeconomic status, and thought as well. The ability to learn in such a community and be surrounded with perspectives that differ from one’s own encourages adults and children alike to open their minds to new possibilities and ways of thought.

#### Institutional Supports and Opportunities

Although the school is the institution that refugee families are interacting with every day—both out of necessity and out of desire—there are many other resources within Winooski that offer support, programming, and networking to the residents of the community. As

Superintendent McMannon explains, the school and the city work well together, bringing a consistency to the experience for families. One such institution aside from the school is the O'Brien Community Center (OCC). The community center is intended to reach both the low income and New American populations in Winooski, and as such is located within walking distance of where the population with the highest need is concentrated. According to Kirstie Paschall, the building occupies "one of the few walkable facilities for that population" and functions as a trusted space which meets populations where they are at—both literally and figuratively. Paschall explains that a goal of the OCC is to "giv[e] New Americans the opportunity to be part of the regular community." One way this is accomplished is through monthly community dinners held at the center; community organizations can reserve a dinner, giving the event each month a host and a theme. The school board, for example, uses these events to share information with parents in a setting that might be more comfortable and accessible for them.

Paschall shares that the City of Winooski has its best success in finding participants for its many programs, such as the garden program—which allots garden spaces to New Americans—when it "can find leaders in [refugee] communities and have them do the outreach for us, essentially." Just as community members trust the school as an institution because of their trust for the multicultural liaisons, community members come to trust the OCC due to their trust in their community leaders. Individuals often engage with the Community Center in multiple way, allowing for stronger connections with the Center, and increasing the center's knowledge of what needs still need to be met. A participant in the garden program, for example, may send their child to an OCC summer program, allowing multiple OCC staff to

engage with this family frequently. From these relationships comes increased trust, as well as an increased ability to provide the services the population needs.

### Limitations

Although much is being done to engage the whole Winooski community, and support each group and individual as thoroughly as possible, community leaders note that their work is not done. Decarreau comments, “I think we could do a whole better job...as a town...and as individuals, trying to find a way to reach out.” The school board, for example, still does not have the lens they need to advocate for each group within the school community. One community dinner, for example, was held during the celebration of Ramadan, isolating a large demographic of parents in the community, as they were fasting and unable to participate in the meal. After explaining this need to respect different religious holidays, Decarreau adds, “How many other things don’t we think about as we go along? And we don’t know what we don’t know until we get slapped with it.” Refugee and New American community leaders must be encouraged to seek leadership roles in the school and city communities, in order to provide a voice to their individual communities and advocate for their needs. In the future, the OCC looks to expand services and allow New Americans the opportunity to lead the programming offered through the Center. Not only will this allow for a general empowerment of the leader, but will also assist in providing services that the community desires to the community from the experts themselves.

Furthermore, the City of Winooski wishes for a home-community multicultural liaison to play a role similar to that of the home-school multicultural liaisons in the school system. Not only would these individuals provide translation and interpretation services, but also would serve as cultural brokers and offer the Community Center the ability to respect new knowledge

about their population in a culturally appropriate way. Additionally, more programs need to be offered that put refugee and native families in the same room to encourage interaction. Many of the legacy families noted by Paschall do not actively reach out to New American populations, but when opportunities are facilitated for them to be in the same room, they do come. More of these opportunities need to be available to allow parents access to the same lessons their children are receiving through the schools, such as the ability to be open-minded towards different ways of thought and the ability to consider various perspectives.



## Conclusion

### Final Thoughts

I was often taught in my younger school years about the melting pot of immigration in the United States; the concept of the melting pot was explained to me in a metaphor about the multicultural salad, which recalled for me a vision of individuals from around the world tossed in a bowl and stirred around together in a dressing to complete the final product that was “America”. Years later, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that this simplified explanation of immigration and assimilation misses the mark entirely. I wish it was realistic, and I wish that we welcomed unique individuals and groups into our communities in the way we are willing to embrace change and new opportunities in other aspects of life. Unlike in a salad, however, in which each ingredient is influenced by those around it to create something greater than the individual parts, our assumption is often that it is the sole responsibility of immigrants to America to assimilate to our culture—we forget that we have as much to learn and appreciate from their cultures as they can learn from ours.

The existence of the Winooski multicultural liaisons allows for the successful integration of Winooski residents into the community, without the expectation that they will shed all the characteristics that make them uniquely them. Integration, although difficult to measure, can be considered successful when families have access to the resources they need, and students are successfully participating in the school community. Through these multicultural liaisons, communication both from school to home, and from home to school, is possible, allowing refugees to engage and get involved with the school community. As Joy Harjo said, “As long as there is respect and acknowledgement of connections, things continue working. When that stops, we all die” (Pipher 2002: ix). The interpretation and trust that the liaisons contribute to

the district allows for refugee integration into Winooski's closed social network. Through my conversations with teachers, parents, and community members, it became clear that with this integration comes further trust and an increase in relationships between neighbors, ultimately creating the strong and supportive network so evident in Winooski. This successful integration into a closed network should be, based on my sociological approach to this research, the ultimate goal in positive and beneficial integration of refugee families into a community. As long as each ethnic group is contributing to the conversation, and participating in the social network that is Winooski, the community will continue to grow and accomplish great things.

What is happening in Winooski, Vermont gives me hope that there are communities in which change is embraced, and new groups and ethnicities are welcomed. The more I learn about the common themes of pain and suffering prevalent in each individual refugee experience, the more I seek solace in the fact that at least one community, a community just next door in a small city in Vermont, is opening its doors to these individuals and their families, and allowing them the space to create a safe home. The processes and resources in place for refugee families in Winooski, particularly through the school institution, allow for the metaphor of an immigration salad to be more of a realistic interpretation of the integration process; each ethnic community contributes to the Winooski "vibe", and community members across the board communicate and interact to create a vibrant and diverse community with so much to offer its residents.

### Looking Forward

The completion of this study by no means implies that all questions have been answered, and that research into this community is complete; rather, this study raised more questions than it did answers. Looking forward, there is so much more to learn about the

refugee community in Winooski, their interactions and involvement with community institutions and organizations, and the ways in which they contribute to this dynamic city. Additionally, there is still much to investigate as to the ways in which the systems in place in Winooski can be applied to other communities across the country with large refugee populations. Rutland, Vermont, for example, was the site of a huge contention regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees to the community. Were this information to be shared with Rutland, perhaps structural changes could be considered to make this resettlement a more positive experience for everyone in the community, as well as for the refugees.

My interviews and research also raised many questions for me about the ways in which school personnel support and interact with refugee students. Hearing from many parents, for example, about their children receiving positive feedback and grades on assignments in which answers are incorrect, leads me to wonder about how teachers are trained to provide feedback to refugee students, and why it is that they react this way to the work of New Americans. Eventually, I look forward to investigating the follow-up questions raised in the writing of this paper when I pursue further education in educational policy, and to ultimately work for a more equal and supportive system nationwide for educating refugee students. This project is just the beginning.

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**Appendix 1**

Table of Interviewees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Kirsten Kollgaard	Director of ELL & Curriculum, Winooski School District
Sean McMannon	Superintendent, Winooski School District
Kirstie Paschall	Children and Family Programs Manager for the City of Winooski
Amila Merdzanovic	Director, Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program
Michael Decarreau	President, Winooski School Board
Nancy Devost	ELL Teacher, JFK Elementary School
Lisa Goetz	Third Grade Teacher, JFK Elementary School
Tul Niroula	Nepali Multicultural Liaison, Winooski School District
DB	Somali Multicultural Liaison, Winooski School District
Lan Nguyen	Vietnamese Multicultural Liaison, Winooski School District
--	Arabic Multicultural Liaison, Winooski School District
--	Burmese Multicultural Liaison, Winooski School District
Somali Family	Came to the US in 2015
Nepali Family	Came to US in June 2016

## Appendix 2

### Interview Instrument

#### a. School Personnel

- Tell me about Winooski
- Tell me about the JFK Elementary School
  - What are the unique aspects of this school district? The challenges? The benefits?
  - What resources does JFK offer to refugee and immigrant families?
  - What school-wide programs exist?
    - Are refugee parents/families attending these events?
- Tell me about working with the New American families
- How do you communicate with families? Email? Phone? Face-to-face?
  - Do you find that these families are attending the events offered?
  - What is the biggest problem these families face?
- Tell me about working with the multicultural liaisons
- What is the most important thing you have learned in your job at the Winooski Schools?
- In your ideal world, what changes would be implemented?
  - What resources do you wish existed?

#### b. O'Brien Community Center

- Tell me about the O'Brien community center and your role there
- Tell me about the services offered in general
  - How do you communicate these services?
- Does the New American population take advantage of your resources?
  - In what ways?
- What other organizations/institutions does the OCC interact with?
- What challenges do you face in this district? What are the benefits of this district?
- What changes would you like to see?
  - Do you think there is most that can/should be done?
  - What resources would you like to offer?

#### c. School Board President

- Tell me about Winooski
- Tell me about your experience with the JFK Elementary School
- What impact do you think learning in such a diverse school system has on the children in the district?
- If you at some point chose to stay in the Winooski school district (rather than moving/pulling children out), what made you stay?
- What community events are offered?
  - Are refugee parents/families attending?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me that might help me understand the school/district better?

d. Director of VRRP

- Tell me a little about the resettlement process to Vermont
  - Why is Vermont a site chosen by USCRI?
  - How many refugees were settled in the past year?
- What do you think are some of the greatest challenges that affect the families settled here?
- What do you think are the most important things for a school district to know about its refugee students?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me/think it would be helpful for me to know about your work, the refugee community in Winooski, or anything else?