



Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies

May 2017

Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies

May 2017



POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

This publication was made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.
The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

Copyright © 2017 by Police Executive Research Forum

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-934485-38-5

Cover and text page design by Dave Williams

Contents

- Acknowledgments 4
- Foreword 5
- Introduction 7

- Refugees in the United States 9**
- Who Is a Refugee? 9
- The 1951 Refugees Convention and the 1967 Protocol 10
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 10
- Considerations for State and Local Police Agencies 10

- The PERF Discussion on Refugee Outreach and
Engagement Programs for Police Agencies 16**
- Laying the Groundwork for Successful Refugee Engagement 17
- Engagement Strategies for Building Relationships with Refugees 18
- Education: An Emphasis on Preventing Crime and Misunderstanding 21
- Cultural Considerations 25
- Next Generation Issues 28
- Navigating a Complex Political Environment 32

- Refugee Outreach and Engagement in the Field:
Case Studies from Police Agencies 35**
- The San Diego Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office 35
- Boise, Idaho’s Refugee Liaison Unit 41
- Fargo, North Dakota’s Cultural Diversity Liaison 47
- Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department’s Refugee-Specific Programming
within the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) 52

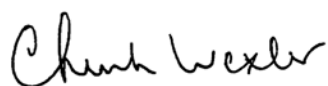
- Conclusion: Promising Practices for
Building Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs 57**
- About PERF 61
- About Carnegie Corporation of New York 62
- Appendix A: The UNCHR’s Six Categories of Resettlement 63
- Appendix B: Understanding the Resettlement Process:
How the United States Has Historically Admitted Refugees 65
- Appendix C: List of Meeting Participants 70

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Carnegie Corporation of New York for supporting this examination of police agencies' programs for engaging with refugee communities. As always, I am grateful to Geri Mannion, Program Director for the U.S. Democracy and Special Opportunities Fund, for recognizing the importance of this issue and for her encouragement and guidance throughout the project. I would also like to thank Program Analyst Andrew Geraghty for his support. Geri, Andrew, and Carnegie Corporation of New York deserve a great deal of credit for shining a light on police efforts to support refugee integration.

PERF also is grateful to everyone who contributed to our research and to the discussion of refugee issues that we held in Washington, D.C. in September 2016. Your insights were invaluable to this project, and your collaborative efforts are a model for the country. Special thanks go to the four police departments whose personnel hosted PERF researchers for site visits and provided the information that served as the foundation of our meeting and this publication: the San Diego Police Department, Boise Police Department, Fargo Police Department, and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. These agencies were incredibly generous with their time and expertise, and they helped define the critical issues that need to be addressed.

Finally, credit is due to PERF staff members who conducted the site visits, coordinated the forum, interviewed practitioners, and helped write and edit this publication, including Director of Technical Assistance Jessica Toliver, Research Associates Elizabeth Miller and Rachael Arietti, Research Assistant Adam Kemerer, and Director of Communications Craig Fischer. Research Associate Margaret Brunner deserves special credit for drafting this report.



Chuck Wexler
Executive Director, Police Executive Research Forum

Foreword

There have been many famous refugees in history. To name just a few: Albert Einstein; the artists Marc Chagall and Piet Mondrian; writers Bertolt Brecht and Victor Hugo; the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe; Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis; former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; film directors Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder, and actress Marlene Dietrich; and a wide range of musicians, from Bela Bartok to Gloria Estefan.

In many cases, these people became famous for their contributions to society *after* they fled persecution and began new lives in another country. If the world had turned its back on them when they needed a new home, they might never have survived and made their achievements in many fields of endeavor.

On the other hand, in one of the most notorious examples of failures to accept refugees, Cuba and the United States in 1939 refused to allow more than 900 mostly Jewish refugees to disembark from the ocean liner *St. Louis*, forcing the ship to return to Europe. There, the refugees were allowed to enter Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Tragically, hundreds of them later died in the Holocaust.

Today there are millions of refugees struggling to escape persecution. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the global population of forcibly displaced persons is larger than the entire population of the United Kingdom.

The largest host countries for refugees currently are Turkey, Pakistan and Lebanon. But historically, the United States has resettled more refugees than any other nation in the world. Today there are many cities and towns in the United States that take pride in welcoming refugees. This report tells the story of four of these jurisdictions: San Diego, CA; Boise, ID; Fargo, ND; and Las Vegas, NV.

Currently, the major source countries of refugees worldwide are Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The four jurisdictions highlighted in this report are home to refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, and other East African countries; Vietnam, Laos, and other parts of Southeast Asia; Iraq and other Middle Eastern nations; Cuba; and other countries.

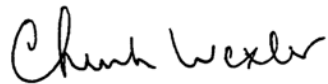
Refugees arriving in America often suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress that began with the horrific conditions that caused them to flee their homeland. Many also face challenges in learning a new language, understanding different cultures, and trying to find ways to support themselves.

To help meet these needs, police agencies are developing programs and strategies for actively welcoming refugees and helping them to thrive. In San Diego, Boise, Fargo, and Las Vegas, for example,

police officers provide a variety of services to refugees, from educational programs and employment services to youth programs and advice on everyday issues, such as translating a utility bill.

By serving community members and building trust, police advance their core mission of providing public safety, because community members are more likely to report crime and talk to the police about what's happening in their neighborhoods when they know and trust their local officers. Police outreach efforts also help to educate refugees about American laws and the legal system, which can reduce misunderstandings and help refugees to avoid breaking laws inadvertently. And community policing programs generally support the important mission of crime prevention.

The fact that police agencies have stepped up to welcome refugees is an important part of the American tradition. Many refugees come from war-torn countries where the police are brutal or corrupt. In sharp contrast, the police agencies highlighted in this report are among the many departments that welcome refugees and look for ways to offer them practical assistance and help them acclimate to their new lives. With the support of police agencies that are focused on building relationships of trust in all their communities, refugees will find it easier to adjust to life in the United States.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck Wexler". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chuck Wexler
Executive Director, Police Executive Research Forum

Introduction

The world is in the midst of a global migration crisis. By the close of 2015, the number of forcibly displaced persons around the globe had reached 65.3 million, surpassing levels seen in the aftermath of the Second World War.¹ Of these, 21.3 million were *refugees*—persons whose displacement forces them to flee their home countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution.²

Much of the attention surrounding the migration crisis in the past two years has centered on Europe, to which more than one million migrants and refugees made their way in 2015. Most came from Syria, fleeing the violence that has beset the country since 2011.³

Historically, however, it is the United States that has resettled more refugees than any other country in the world.^{4,5} Since 1975, more than three million refugees have begun new lives in the United States.

For police agencies across the country, this means that every year refugees are joining the communities they serve. Refugees often face unique challenges when building new lives in the United States, and police departments play a critical role in ensuring their successful integration into the community.

In 2016, and as part of a general support grant from Carnegie Corporation, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) examined promising practices and lessons learned for police outreach to refugees in the community. As part of this study, PERF documented the impact that refugee outreach has on police work, public safety, and building trust with the community. PERF conducted site visits with police departments and their community partners, as well as in-depth telephone interviews with police practitioners across the country. With support from Carnegie Corporation, PERF also held a one-day forum

1. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015*. <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>, p. 5.

2. Ibid. “Refugee” is a specific legal status. “Refugees” are those who have been forced to flee their countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. These definitions are discussed in more detail below in the Section, “*Refugees in the United States*.”

3. BBC News. “Migration crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts.” March 4, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>.

4. American Immigration Council, “An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy” (Nov. 18, 2015), available at <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/overview-us-refugee-law-and-policy>.

5. Jie Zong & Jeanne Batalova, Migration Policy Institute, *Refugees and Asylees in the United States*, (Oct. 28, 2015), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>.

in Washington, D.C. on September 13, 2016 for police agencies and their community partners to discuss refugee engagement and methods for success.

This report details PERF's findings. Intended to serve as a guide for police professionals, this report presents promising practices and lessons learned for conducting outreach to your refugee community. The report has been divided into the following three main sections to assist agencies with developing or expanding their own outreach programs:

1. Refugees in the United States — Understanding the refugee resettlement process and its impact on police agencies, including:

- Refugees' perceptions of police;
- How trauma and fear impact refugees' interactions with state and local police; and
- Practical realities of resettlement and potential victimization.

2. The PERF Discussion on Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies — Effectively engaging with refugee communities, including:

- Building relationships with refugee resettlement agencies;
- Working with cultural, political, and religious leaders within the refugee communities;
- Increasing positive relationships with refugees through targeted outreach;
- Implementing educational programming to help support refugee integration;
- Ensuring departmental proficiency with cultural competency and working with individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP);
- Expanding training to address issues that may arise when refugees have been resettled in the United States for a longer period of time, including:
 - Cultural differences on issues of disciplining children
 - Empowering Positive Youth Development
- Reinforcing messaging and clarifying facts to assuage fears in the face of an increasingly complex political environment.

3. Refugee Outreach and Engagement in the Field: Case studies from police agencies

- San Diego's Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office
- Boise, Idaho's Refugee Liaison Unit
- Fargo, North Dakota's Cultural Diversity Liaison
- Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Refugee-Specific Programming

Refugees in the United States

Who Is a Refugee?

A refugee is 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...”⁶

Definitions and Terms: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Migrants

“Refugees,” “internally displaced persons,” and “migrants” are all terms that refer to people in distinct circumstances.

As described above, **refugees** are people who, because of a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, are forced to flee their countries and are afraid or unable to return.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs), on the other hand, are those who have been forced to flee their homes for the same reasons but have remained in their countries/have not crossed an international border.⁷

Migrants are those who “choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such impediment to return. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government.”⁸

6. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. “The 1951 Refugee Convention.” 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.html>.

7. USA for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. “What is a refugee.” <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>.

8. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. “UNHCR Viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘Migrant’ – Which is Right?” (Jul. 11, 2016), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>.

The 1951 Refugees Convention and the 1967 Protocol

This definition of the term “refugee” was established in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention), a United Nations (UN) multilateral treaty. In addition to defining “refugee,” the 1951 Refugee Convention outlines the legal protections and other rights and assistance afforded to refugees by the Convention’s signatories. It also established the principle of **non-refoulement**, which means that host countries cannot force refugees to return to places where they might be persecuted.⁹ The 1951 Refugee Convention also describes the categories of people—such as war criminals—who do not qualify for refugee status, as well as the obligations that refugees have to their host countries.¹⁰

The protections afforded by the 1951 Refugee Convention, however, were limited to Europeans fleeing persecution in the wake of the Second World War. This changed in 1967 with the “1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees” (1967 Protocol). The 1967 Protocol eliminated the 1951 Convention’s geographic restrictions, so that everyone who fits the definition of “refugee,” regardless of country of origin, is protected.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, also known as the UN Refugee Agency, was created in 1951 and was mandated to provide international protection to refugees.¹¹ In practice, this means that the UNHCR spearheads efforts to attend to the safety and well-being of refugees living in temporary shelters and camps around the world. As part of these efforts, the UNHCR provides refugees with food, shelter, and healthcare.¹²

The UNHCR is also involved in making Refugee Status Determinations (RSDs). According to the UNHCR, RSD is defined as “the legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional or national law.”¹³ While individual countries are typically responsible for determining whether or not someone qualifies for refugee status, the UNHCR is able to do so when a country is unable or unwilling to make RSDs.¹⁴

The United States historically has made its own eligibility for Refugee Status Determinations using the process outlined below.

Considerations for State and Local Police Agencies

For local police agencies in refugee resettlement areas, refugees are part of the communities they serve, so the police must tailor their outreach accordingly. Due to the experiences refugees have endured, many face unique challenges when building new lives within the United States. Such challenges are not always accounted for in traditional police multi-cultural outreach efforts.

Therefore, in order to effectively engage with refugees in their communities, local police must learn about and understand the experiences of their particular refugee communities and structure their outreach efforts accordingly.

9. Ibid.

10. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “What is a Refugee,” available at <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>.

11. UH General Assembly, *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 14 December 1950, A/RES/428(V), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/basic/3b66c39e1/statute-office-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html>.

12. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “What We Do,” available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-we-do.html>.

13. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “Refugee Status Determination,” available at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugee-status-determination.html>.

14. Ibid.

A Brief History of Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The first refugees to seek a new life in what is now known as the United States were, some might argue, the Pilgrims.¹⁵ In 1948—in the wake of the Second World War and the resulting displacement crisis—Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act to formalize the admissions process for European refugees.¹⁶ Between 1945 and 1950, approximately 350,000 Europeans made a new home in the United States.¹⁷

The United States signed the U.N. 1951 Refugee Convention in 1968.¹⁸ Later, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which improved the organization of refugee resettlement services and “established a procedure for the president to set a ‘ceiling’ or ‘target’ for the number of yearly refugee admissions.”¹⁹ It also incorporated the United Nations’ definition of “refugee” into U.S. law.²⁰

For additional information, see Appendix B, “Understanding the Resettlement Process: How the United States Has Historically Admitted Refugees” on page 65.

This graph, created by the Pew Research Center, shows the origins of refugees admitted to the United States between 1975 and 2016.²¹



15. Matthew Green. “Were Pilgrims America’s Original Refugees?” *KQED*. November 23, 2016. <https://ww2.kqed.org/lowdown/2016/11/23/wait-but-werent-the-pilgrims-refugees-too/>.

16. Matthew Green. “Coming to America: A History of Refugee Resettlement (with Lesson Plan).” *KQED*. February 21, 2017. <https://ww2.kqed.org/lowdown/2017/02/21/coming-to-america-a-history-of-refugee-resettlement-since-world-war-ii-with-lesson-plan/>.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees. “About US Refugees Admissions Program (USRAP).” <http://dhr.maryland.gov/maryland-office-for-refugees-and-asylees/us-refugees-admissions-program-usrap/>.

21. Ruth Igielnik & Jen Manuel Krogstad, Pew Research Center, “Where Refugee to the U.S. Come From,” (Feb. 3, 2017), available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/17/where-refugees-to-the-u-s-come-from/>.

Refugee Perceptions of Police

Many refugees have suffered physical, historical, and/or psychological traumas. Often, that trauma is specifically rooted in the actions of police and government forces in their countries of origin. Police

“Refugees do not want to come in and report crimes to the police station, because in their country, if you go to the police station, there’s a high likelihood that you will not leave in the same condition that you walked into that building. We want them to come to us, so we have to change our department’s thinking about how to engage and interact.”

**Officer Dustin Robinson,
Boise, ID Police Department**



**Girma Zaid, Board Member,
African Community Center, Las Vegas**

officers may have served as the *agents* for brutal regimes whose persecution many refugees are fleeing. For example, in the modern day Democratic Republic of the Congo, police and government military forces are often used as wings of an oppressive government, silencing dissent through violence, mass arrests, and committing what many international groups consider war crimes.²² As a result, refugees who resettle in the United States are often deeply distrustful of any police force.

“The definition of law enforcement in different countries is fear,” said Girma Zaid, a board member of the East African Community Center in Las Vegas. “‘To protect and serve’ doesn’t resonate to the refugee, and it is going to take years of building trust to be able to transition from fear to protecting and serving.”

Jodi Larson-Farrow, the Case Management Supervisor at the Boise Agency for New Americans, conducts an introductory exercise with her recently-resettled refugee clients in order to assess their initial attitudes towards police. Larson asks clients to tell her the first few words that come to mind when they think of law enforcement. The most common responses from refugee clients are the following: fear, rapist, power, corruption, intimidation, no trust, they will beat you, they will take your life, run from them.

Therefore, in addition to the language and cultural barriers that separate refugees and police in many U.S. localities, there is a deeper source of distrust that can hamper engagement from the outset. To fully understand the barriers that may stand in the way of building trust, U.S. police must be educated about the historical experiences of refugee communities with their native police forces.



**Jodi Larson-Farrow, Case Management
Supervisor, Boise Agency for New Americans**

Refugee Associations with the Term “Police”:

- “Fear”
- “Rapist”
- “Power”
- “Corruption”
- “Intimidation”
- “No Trust”
- “They will beat you”
- “They will take your life”
- “Run from them”²³

22. See Human Rights Watch, Democratic Republic of the Congo, <https://www.hrw.org/africa/democratic-republic-congo>. See also William Clowes, Is Congo’s Brutal National Police Force Showing Signs of Reform?, Slate, Mar. 11, 2016, available at http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/roads/2016/03/is_congo_s_brutal_national_police_force_showing_signs_of_reform.html (stating the “DRC’s government has established a reputation for not playing fair with opponents, and its security forces—the police, the military, and the intelligence agency—are typically regarded as the bluntest of the instruments with which the country’s rulers silence those who cause trouble”).

23. Presentation by Jodi Larson-Farrow, Boise Agency for New Americans, September 22, 2016, Washington, DC.

Trauma and Fear: Issues That May Impact Interactions With Refugees

In order to craft the most effective engagement and outreach programs, police should have an understanding of how trauma can impact their ability to interact with refugees. “Trauma is a huge piece in the resettlement process that police can easily overlook,” said Ms. Larson-Farrow of the Boise Agency for New Americans. Larson believes that a trauma-informed approach on the part of the department can help build understanding and trust with refugees, and she educates Boise police officers on how to utilize this approach.

In some instances, refugees’ exposure to trauma can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disorder that can last months or years where specific “triggers” bring back memories or flashbacks of terrifying events.

Trauma can also affect the memory center of the brain and a person’s ability to retain information,²⁴ which can complicate the person’s interactions with police. This is particularly important for police to understand when designing orientation classes for refugees on United States laws. In practical terms, this means that orientation cannot be a one-time event. Rather, consistent communication must occur over time for refugees to fully grasp and understand the legal system of their new home country.

For example, the Salt Lake City Police Department discovered in the aftermath of a police-involved shooting of a refugee that members of the refugee community (whose justice system in their home country typically resolves issues swiftly) assumed there would be no consequences for the officer, simply because the investigation was still pending and they had not been aware of the process. As a result of this incident, the department recognized the need to expand their educational efforts to avoid confusion surrounding such issues in the future.

One session presenting relevant laws may not be sufficient for refugees to fully internalize and remember a complex mass of information. And while ignorance of the law does not excuse violations, police agencies should recognize that refugees may not be fully familiar with U.S. laws, particularly when they first arrive in the United States.

Police agencies should also be aware of the potential for their contacts with refugees to trigger a “fight or flight” response. “Fight or flight” is a physiological response to a perceived threat that can result in emotional reactions, including aggression and anxiety.²⁵ Because refugees may have had traumatic experiences with police in their home countries, simple interactions with U.S. police may trigger unexpected responses. “A reaction that may not seem reasonable as the interaction is occurring can rather be a normal reaction to their first traumatic experience,” said Larson-Farrow.

A history of trauma does not absolve an individual of noncompliance with lawful police directions, but interactions can end differently if a police officer has an awareness of why a refugee may be afraid of speak with the police. Awareness that refugees’ past involvement with law enforcement may have been traumatic can help break down barriers and prevent misunderstanding.



“Some refugees come to the United States with severe PTSD, because from the day they were born, they have lived in a war-torn country where they never have had peace or known what it’s like to not have bombs or bullet fire going off.”

**Lt. Sasha Larkin, Las Vegas
Metropolitan Police Department**

24. See, e.g., Bremner, J.D. (2006). “The Relationship Between Cognitive and Brain Changes in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1071: 80-86. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3233753/>.

25. See Sherin, J.E. (2011). “Post-traumatic stress disorder: the neurobiological impact of psychological trauma.” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 13(3): 263-278. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3182008/>. See also Wilson, C., Lonsway, K.A., Archambault, J. (2016). “Understanding the Neurobiology of Trauma and Implications for Interviewing Victims.” End Violence Against Women International. <https://www.evawintl.org/Library/DocumentLibraryHandler.ashx?id=842>.

The Practical Realities of Resettlement

While deeper issues like trauma and fear are important for police officers to understand, most refugees may be more concerned with immediate practicalities as they integrate into the United States. Fundamental matters like securing steady work, ensuring their children gain access to schooling, and finding housing will likely be at the forefront of most refugees' minds as they first settle in the United States.



“Economic self-sufficiency for refugees is probably the number one thing needed for their success in this country. Unfortunately many governmental organizations and departments at all levels, including law enforcement, often forget that critical component.”

**Captain Sean Gladieux,
Greensboro (NC) Police Department**

Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang, who oversaw the San Diego Police Department's Multi-Cultural Unit tasked with engaging with refugee communities in the city, takes these immediate concerns into account when structuring the department's outreach. “My first and foremost concern as a refugee is, ‘How am I going to feed my family, and how will I care for them?’” Yang said.

To alleviate refugees' concerns, the department established a police department “storefront” office in the district where most refugees live, to allow them to walk in at any times and obtain departmental resources. Available resources include referrals to direct service providers and help with new challenges (e.g., understanding a utility bill, or determining which government agency can provide various kinds of assistance). *(For more information, see “The Multi-Cultural Storefront and PSOs” on page 36)*

While it is not the police department's responsibility to ensure the financial security of refugees within the community, many police agencies have determined it is in the best interest of the community as a whole to develop outreach strategies that help refugees get a start with basic issues. In Fargo, North Dakota, for example, Officer Cristie Jacobsen decided at the beginning of her tenure as the Cultural Diversity Liaison to set up her office in a convenient location for refugees. Because many refugees initially do not have drivers' licenses and rely on access to public transportation, Jacobsen obtained permission to locate her office at the English Language Center in Fargo. The English Language Center is a natural gathering place for refugees who attend ESL and orientation classes offered by the resettlement agencies.

Relocating her office to the Center allowed Jacobsen to engage in daily face-to-face interactions with refugees in a non-threatening environment. *(For more information, see “Fargo, North Dakota's Cultural Diversity Liaison” on page 47)*

Victimization of Refugees and Fear of Being a Victim/Witness

Unfortunately, because refugees tend to be less familiar with U.S. laws and cultural norms, and less willing to seek the assistance of police, they are often targeted and victimized by criminals or unscrupulous persons. For example, landlords may prey upon refugees unfamiliar with their rights, providing them with poor living conditions and charging unreasonably high rent prices. Resettlement and police agencies have noticed that schemes to defraud refugees are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Grassroots organizer Bhuwan Pyakurel of Community Refugee & Immigration Service in Columbus, Ohio, said that group is seeing an increase in cyber crime targeting refugees, for example by tricking refugees into trying to transfer money abroad to relatives or friends in their country of origin, but instead diverting the money to cyber-criminals. In some instances, fraudsters targeting refugees have been able to trick them with specific information about their home countries, down to giving details about the particular refugee camp where they stayed, Pyakurel said.

Criminals may also threaten refugees following a crime to prevent them from reporting it to the police. “People specifically exploit refugees. They



**Bhuwan Pyakurel, Community
Refugee & Immigration Services
of Columbus, OH**

target them by calling them and saying, ‘If you don’t pay us by a certain time, your electricity will be cut off,’ and if they report it, they will lose everything,” said Pyakurel.

Because many refugees are too fearful to place their trust in police, police agencies nationwide report that convincing refugees to report crime is their biggest challenge. (For more information, see “*Refugee Perceptions of Police*” on page 12 and “*Trauma and Fear: Issues That May Impact Interactions With Refugees*” on page 13). This gap in trust has motivated police departments across the country to tailor their outreach efforts to refugees living in their communities, to address each community’s specific needs.

Refugees who are victims or witnesses to crime can provide crucial information to assist police investigations, so it is imperative to engage and build relationships of trust within the refugee community. In Boise, Idaho, former Refugee Liaison Officer Shelli Sonnenberg-Wardle was able to help the Police Department close a rape case through her work with the refugee community. Officer Sonnenberg-Wardle said that one witness, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, did not focus on the hair or eye color of the rapist as much as the shape of his facial features. The witness was able to describe the rapist’s bone structure and face shape in a much more detailed manner than most eyewitnesses do, which helped the department to identify a suspect based on a sketch. (See Case Study “*Boise, Idaho’s Refugee Liaison Unit*” on page 41 for details on how BPD officers conduct outreach and develop relationships of trust that lead to witnesses coming forward.)

Engagement efforts to refugee communities must be consistent, because even if an individual feels comfortable providing initial information to the police, when cases get farther along in the criminal justice system, refugees may become reluctant to continue their participation in the process. Asad Mohamed, a civilian Police Service Officer with the San Diego Police Department who works closely with Somali victims and witnesses, often encounters this challenge. “Even when refugees make a police report, they are afraid of court,” he said. “They say, ‘I will be cross-examined and asked all of these questions.’ The suspects know this, and can take advantage of that fear.” If refugees become victims of a crime and do make a report, there are many additional hurdles that police will need to overcome, to convince these victims to trust in the system.

It should be noted that these issues are not unique to refugee communities. Police departments often encounter reluctance of crime victims from all backgrounds, especially in sexual assault cases and cases where victims fear retaliation, to work with police and prosecutors to obtain an arrest, prosecution and conviction. However, refugee communities often pose special challenges to police in this area because of their experiences with government oppression in their countries of origin, and their lack of experience with American agencies.



“We want refugees to feel safe reporting crimes to us. The challenge right now is that they don’t trust police officers and will not come to us. Our department remains committed to protecting refugees by ensuring that we offer services to make them feel safe to report all crimes committed against them—particularly hate or bias-motivated crimes and incidents.”

Captain Cheryl Crawley, Metropolitan (Washington, D.C.) Police Department



Asad Mohamed, Police Service Officer, San Diego Police Department

The PERF Discussion on Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies

On September 22, 2016, PERF hosted a forum in Washington, D.C. to discuss promising practices and lessons learned regarding police outreach and engagement with refugee communities, with project funding from Carnegie Corporation of New York. PERF brought together police agencies interested in expanding their existing outreach programs or creating refugee-specific programming, along with NGO partners who resettle refugees, immigration advocacy organizations, and grassroots community representatives. The more than 50 participants who attended the forum came from across the nation and represented areas with significant amounts of refugee resettlement activity.

The goal of the meeting was to share strategies for building and maintaining positive relationships with refugees who have resettled in the United States. Participants said that welcoming refugees had enriched their communities, and discussed how collaboration among police agencies, resettlement groups, and community leaders had assured the successful integration of refugees into U.S. communities, thus increasing public safety.



Laying the Groundwork for Successful Refugee Engagement

Building Relationships with Resettlement Agencies

The first step in the process of creating refugee outreach programming is simple: Police officers must proactively introduce themselves to and create relationships with resettlement agencies.

Resettlement agencies possess a wealth of knowledge that can help police engage with refugees in their communities. For example, resettlement agencies know in advance which refugee communities will be resettling in a given area, and have an understanding of their culture and history which they can share with the police. In this way, officers can learn about cultural practices that may affect their interactions and ability to build trust.

Resettlement agencies are also required by law to conduct orientation classes. These classes are an excellent opportunity for police to deliver education on U.S. laws and the role of police (for more information, see *“Education: An Emphasis on Preventing Crime and Misunderstanding”* on page 21).

Police officials at the PERF meeting said that they found resettlement agencies to be eager partners for collaboration. For example, in Fargo, North Dakota, the Police Department’s Cultural Diversity Liaison Cristie Jacobsen simply knocked on the door of resettlement agencies to introduce herself. “I told them that I knew nothing, and asked if they wanted to develop a relationship with me,” said Jacobsen. Jacobsen said that staff members at Lutheran Social Services (LSS) were welcoming and eager to help her understand the journey that refugees take to come to the United States, clear up any misconceptions that she had, and provide her with cultural background information on the refugees who were being resettled in Fargo. “If not for our information-sharing and collaborative relationship, we would not have moved forward on this issue,” Jacobsen said.

Because resettlement staff members are people whom refugees trust and turn to for help, their cooperative relationships with police are vital to police departments’ efforts to overcome refugees’ distrust. “Standing next to the police department in our communities, we can see that we’re changing attitudes towards police and diminishing our clients’ fearfulness,” said Borka Paponjak, Resettlement & Placement Manager for the International Rescue Committee in Seattle.

In some cities, resettlement staff members will show their clients a picture of designated liaison staff in their police departments, telling refugees that they can trust the person and go to them if they have any problems. That way, before police community engagement officers meet refugees, refugees are primed to see them as an ally.

In order to break down distrust of police, it is not enough for refugees to have a relationship only with police outreach personnel. Refugees must feel comfortable engaging with the rest of the police department, from patrol officers to command staff.

In Houston, for example, the Police Department has made engagement with resettlement agencies a command-level priority. Assistant Chief Mattie Provost attends a quarterly meeting with the resettlement agencies in Houston in order to underscore the department’s commitment to building trust between refugees and the police department. “I want the resettlement agencies to feel like they have a direct line to someone in HPD leadership,



“Running a refugee resettlement agency over the past seven years, I couldn’t imagine our staff not working with the police as a core business practice. For refugees who have lost any kind of predictability, including law and order, for them to integrate and be successful in a country like the U.S., one of the key foundations of that success is believing in law enforcement.”

**Ruben Chandrasekar,
Executive Director, International
Rescue Committee Maryland**



**Mattie Provost, Assistant Chief,
Houston Police Department**



"I have committed to serve the community because of my experience in my homeland. I try to do my best to help refugees, due to my experience with turmoil, discrimination, corruption, and everything else. Resettlement is not an easy life."

**Abraham To, Chairman,
Vietnamese/Indochinese
Advisory Board of San Diego**



**Ivan Chatman, Sergeant, Las Vegas
Metro Police Department**

that they can pick up the phone and tell me any issue they're experiencing," Chief Provost said.

Resettlement agency personnel also encourage clients to file police reports if they are victims of crime, and help them file such reports. "Once we built a relationship with the IRC, we started learning about all kinds of crime that were happening in the community, of which we were not previously aware," said Major Richard Worley of the Baltimore Police Department.

Working with Cultural, Political, or Religious Leaders for Each Refugee Community

Police departments also must reach beyond resettlement agencies and look for community leaders with whom to engage. Participants at the PERF meeting emphasized that working with trusted leaders in the community is critical to effective outreach efforts.

Even when a particular community has many members who do not trust police, police departments have been able to find leaders who are willing to work with them. In Las Vegas, Girma Zaid, a lawyer who also leads the East African Community Center, approached the city's Police Department Community Engagement Team several years ago and offered to help them learn more about the city's growing Ethiopian community. This led to the development of a close relationship between the police and Zaid and other cultural leaders in the Ethiopian community, which has helped the Department to gain a deeper understanding of how to prevent crime.

"In law enforcement, too often we don't look for the root of a problem behind a crime," said Sergeant Ivan Chatman of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Community Engagement Team. "We just deal with the aftermath of the crime and check the boxes. That's why it's so important to partner with community members who know things that we don't."

The Department's relationship with leaders in the Ethiopian community proved especially helpful when the Ethiopian New Year fell on September 11 several years ago. LVMPD worked with the East African Community Center to provide security, attend the event, and help dispel any misunderstanding in the community about the cause for celebration.

"When they came into the churches for the September 11 New Year's celebration, an officer in plainclothes came on the stage and said, 'Happy New Year!' in the Amharic Ethiopian language. That was the icebreaker, and the applause and acceptance came after," Zaid said. "They didn't come to the community thinking that they're going to enforce. I'd rather have someone coming in with respect for the community and culture and say, 'Come join us.'"

Engagement Strategies for Building Relationships with Refugees

Greeting and Welcoming Refugees

In several jurisdictions across the United States, police agencies participate in programs to greet refugees when they first arrive and conduct in-person meetings with all incoming refugees. These initial contacts help lay the groundwork for successful engagement between police and refugees.

In Portland, Oregon, officers created a novel program to welcome refugees. The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) works with Catholic Charities to send officers with resettlement staff as they pick up

arriving refugees at the airport. PPB began the program by asking officers to volunteer to participate, and to dress in uniform in an effort to overcome refugees' initial fear of police. The PPB officers joined with volunteers in the community from refugees' native countries who make home-cooked meals, which PPB officers then bring to the airport to put newly-arrived refugees at ease, and to demonstrate the Department's appreciation of their culture. Lieutenant Jami Resch and Officer Natasha Haunsperger, who organized the program at PPB, have reported initial success with the pilot. "Refugees have been very appreciative and welcoming of our officers," said Haunsperger.

Some police departments require their refugee liaison officers to meet in-person with all refugees in their jurisdiction. In Utah, the Department of Public Safety established an official refugee liaison position in the past year. Starting in 2016, this dedicated DPS agent, who spends all of his time working with refugees, has personally met with every refugee who has resettled in Utah to welcome them. "These interactions really help them appreciate the fact that law enforcement officers truly get into this work because they care about people," said Utah DPS Commissioner Keith Squires. "Refugees are a part of the community that we have sworn to protect."

Connecting with Service Providers

According to participants at the September 22, 2016 meeting, forging relationships with community service providers is also a promising practice for reaching out to refugees. One such example is the San Diego Police Department's creation of its San Diego Multicultural Community Relations Storefront ("Storefront"), a physical presence in the neighborhood where most refugees live in San Diego. Nine civilian Police Service Officers (PSOs) staff the Storefront and are responsible for connecting refugees to service providers in the community (for more information on Police Service Officers, see "The Multi-Cultural Storefront and PSOs" on page 36).

This assistance includes providing non-police related advice, such as teaching community members how to pay an electric bill, or connecting individuals to legal aid organizations. "The community comes into the Multicultural Storefront for a variety of different services and I have learned to become resourceful and refer people to many different agencies in the community," said Police Service Officer Asad Mohamed, who works with the robust Somali community in San Diego. Being able to help refugees in this manner lays the groundwork for engagement in San Diego, including fostering a positive image of the department with the community. "Our Multicultural Storefront is a fundamental component for giving us success with outreach," said SDPD's Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang, who was formerly responsible for overseeing the Storefront.

Police departments can also use relationships with service providers to push outreach efforts beyond their own budgets, particularly if they do not have significant funding for community engagement. Many service providers in the community already have a system for connecting with refugees. Chief Mike Villa of the Tukwila (WA) Police Department noted that this strategy is particularly helpful for small departments with fewer resources. "There are already organizations in our communities doing great work that we can leverage," said Villa. For example, the Tukwila Police Department has asked parent liaisons at the school district if officers can speak at parents' nights. This past summer, Tukwila police collaborated with the City's Parks and Recreation Department to volunteer officers to help distribute sack lunches as a part of the parks department's preexisting program.

In some cases, these relationships have inspired officers to engage in their own community service. In New York, officers organize collections for money or clothing following natural disasters in refugees' home countries. "We have found it helpful to conduct proactive outreach when we know



**Natasha Haunsperger, Officer,
Portland (OR) Police Bureau**



Theresa Tobin, Deputy Chief,
New York City Police Department

something has happened in the homeland of our population. It goes a long way in terms of building trust and shows that we do care,” said Deputy Chief Theresa Tobin of the NYPD.

Increasing Interpersonal Interactions to Build Relationships

Police departments have also become creative in devising ways to increase their face-to-face interactions with refugees in the community. For example, the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) implemented an outreach program that put officers tasked with engagement on bicycles—known as “Bike Cops for Kids.” This initiative began in 2009 with the goal of improving relationships between youth and police officers.²⁶ In partnership with local businesses, bike officers hand out free helmets, lights, locks, and sometimes bicycles to children in low-income areas of Minneapolis,

with a particular emphasis on the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood where most refugees live. MPD has continued to expand the program, finding that neighborhood residents have embraced the officers because of the value they bring to the area. The Houston Police Department has recently begun implementing similar initiatives—increasing bike and foot patrols, and encouraging officers to visit local businesses and meet community members, said Assistant Chief Mattie Provost.

In Tukwila, Washington, the police department tasked a sergeant, known as the Community Liaison Officer, with creating connections between the refugee and immigrant community and his fellow officers. “It is critical to have the community not simply trust a dedicated officer, but the entire department,” said TPD Chief Mike Villa. Tukwila has a substantial Somali refugee population who

often gather at the local mosque, which is the largest in the Pacific Northwest. The Community Liaison Officer became heavily involved in the mosque’s basketball league, and brought many other officers in to participate. The department has seen a direct benefit from these connections. In one success story, TPD responded to a large disturbance involving Somali men at a shopping center. The on-duty patrol sergeant contacted leaders at the mosque and was able to resolve the incident without resorting to arrests.

Other departments have fostered similar initiatives. In New York, NYPD officers have started to learn and play cricket at the behest of communities where that sport is part of the culture. This development “has really engaged our youth, so they’re not on their laptops all the time, and also given our officers insight on where refugees are coming from,” said Deputy Chief Theresa Tobin. “Integration is not a one-way street, it’s a cultural exchange.”



Mike Villa, Chief, Tukwila (WA)
Police Department

Formal Structures for Community Policing Initiatives

Police agencies across the country have also implemented more formal community policing programs geared towards improving their relationship with refugees. Participants in the PERF meeting shared examples of programming they have found to be successful in building trust between police departments and refugee communities.

In San Diego, the police department established official **Advisory Boards** with different cultural communities in the city. Composed of prominent community members and cultural/religious leaders,

26. Brandt Williams, “Minneapolis Bike Cops Have a New Way To Reach Out to Kids,” Minnesota Public Radio News (May 1, 2016). <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/05/11/mps-bike-cops-have-new-way-to-reach-out-to-kids>.

the boards empower community leaders to have a voice in how they would like the police department to engage with them. The Advisory Boards are the main line of communication between SDPD and various refugee communities, allowing the department and communities to address issues and concerns and share information. Currently there are Advisory Boards for the Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong, and East African communities in San Diego. (For more information, see “*Advisory Boards and Youth Programs*” on page 38.)

Several police departments, such as the Salt Lake City Police Department, host official events or **town halls** geared specifically towards refugee communities. Police departments also have developed **specialized Citizens’ Academies**, designed to deepen engagement with particular refugee groups in their community. For example, the Sacramento Police Department has a Slavic Citizens’ Academy geared toward refugees and émigrés from the former Soviet Union. The Minneapolis Police Department has created a Somali Youth Citizens’ Academy, in which the police educate “youth ambassadors” on police practices.²⁷

Education: An Emphasis on Preventing Crime and Misunderstanding

Participants at the PERF meeting agreed that the central focus of refugee outreach programming must be education. Frank discussions about the differences between life in the United States and life in refugee camps and home countries are crucial to supporting refugees’ cultural integration. These programs help prevent public safety issues or calls for service stemming from cultural misunderstandings (see “*Police Issues Stemming from Cultural Misunderstanding*” on page 25).

Initial Training for Refugees New to the United States

Many police agencies have started partnering with resettlement agencies to conduct educational sessions with refugees during the orientation of refugees that is required by law.²⁸ In most cities, these programs have evolved similarly: resettlement groups give police trainers a two-hour block in the orientation schedule to discuss their role and to provide basic information about federal and state legal systems. This initial training is not designed to be a comprehensive guide to the criminal justice system in the United States, but rather to discuss the most important topics that refugees must learn for successful integration. With that narrow focus in mind, many police agencies have worked with their resettlement partners to determine the essential topics that this initial training should cover.

In addition to having an educational purpose, orientation training programs are opportunities to build positive relationships between refugees and police. “We’ve implemented an initiative where community liaison officers are giving presentations to newly arrived refugees, and it is working



“Your goal has to be to provide a proactive resource for refugees to have a better shot with successful integration into U.S. society, our systems, and way of life.”

**Utah Public Safety Commissioner
Keith Squires**



“What we have found is that a lot of crimes that are committed can be prevented with just a little bit of education. Instead of continuing to give refugees tickets, we educate.”

**Lieutenant Jami Resch, Portland, OR
Police Bureau**

27. See Somali Youths Finish Mpls. Police Citizens’ Academy, CBS Minneapolis (Apr. 11, 2011), available at <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2011/04/11/somali-youths-finish-mpls-police-citizens-academy/>.

28. For example, some of the departments engaging in orientation training at the time of the meeting included: the Boise Police Department, the Fargo Police Department, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, the Portland (OR) Police Bureau, the Tukwila (WA) Police Department, the Utah Department of Public Safety, the San Diego Police Department, and the Wichita Police Department.

beautifully for showing the refugees that the department is very welcoming and supportive,” said Borka Paponjak, the Resettlement & Placement Manager for the International Rescue Committee for the Seattle area.

The various training programs created by police departments across the United States are also remarkably similar in terms of their content. Despite cultural differences among the various refugee groups served, many refugees share similar experiences. As a result, a broad consensus has emerged on the training topics that police should discuss:

1. THE ROLE OF POLICE:

In order to counter negative perceptions that refugees may have about police, it is crucial to have an open discussion about the role of police officers in the United States. Some departments emphasize that the role of the police is to serve as “guardians” of the community (as opposed to the concept of “warriors” against crime that has sometimes been considered the traditional role of police). Many departments begin by reaffirming that they welcome refugees to the community. This helps to lay the groundwork for positive engagement and discussions about the police role in protecting community members’ rights. For example, in Tukwila, Washington, Community Liaison Officers review basic Know-Your-Rights scenarios, to emphasize their respect of refugees’ basic freedoms.



Adamou Mohamed, Grassroots Organizer, Church World Service of Greensboro, NC

One promising suggestion at the PERF meeting was that police should talk about what public service means to them. “Something that is missing sometimes is having officers tell refugees their stories to show why they do what they do. It is not just because you want a paycheck, or because you like guns. It’s because something happened in your life that made you want to help people. It is through stories that people can be connected and build trust and strong relationships,” said Adamou Mohamed, a grassroots organizer with Church World Service (Greensboro, NC).

Police departments also teach refugees how to call for emergency services and the appropriate use of 911. In some instances, departments will run through scenario-based training to make refugees feel comfortable. “In my classes, I will take a couple of refugees and put them through a mock 911 call. We’ve found it very powerful, because we can explain why they should do it this way and how first responders operate,” said Sergeant Ivan Chatman of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

Importantly, police departments also should use this opportunity to discuss anti-corruption laws in the United States. Refugees may come from countries where it is commonplace to bribe the police in order to avoid conflict, criminal prosecution, or traffic citations. Police should warn refugees that attempts to give them money are illegal and unwanted.

2. INTERACTING WITH POLICE:

Police should train refugees on what to do if they come into contact with officers, starting with the idea that refugees should not be afraid. “We have had several instances where police came into contact with refugees, and the refugees thought they were going to be harmed,” said Major Jimmy Vaughan of the Dallas Police Department. Because these interactions could potentially trigger painful trauma (see “*Trauma and Fear: Issues that May Impact Interactions with Refugees*,” page 13), it is essential for refugees to have an understanding of how routine police contacts occur. For example, police should discuss how to act in a traffic stop in a manner that provides officers with all pertinent information.



Jimmy Vaughan, Major, Dallas Police Department

3. BASIC TRANSPORTATION RULES AND INFORMATION:

To reduce the possibility of traffic tickets or other citations, police officers should provide refugees with an overview of basic rules for common modes of transportation. If refugees tend to travel via bicycle in their jurisdiction, officers should discuss the most important rules for bicycle safety in their area. Officers should also provide an overview of driving regulations (e.g., laws against driving without a license or driving under the influence of alcohol) and the process for obtaining a drivers' license.

Prior to embarking on a training program, the Portland (OR) Police Bureau found that their biggest problem with refugees' breaking the law was related to the public transit system. Refugees did not understand how to obtain a transit card and that entering without purchasing a ticket was illegal. "We used to see a lot of violations on our public transportation system because refugees did not know how to use it," said Lieutenant Jami Resch of the Portland police. The department now includes this topic in its orientation and has seen a reduction in the number of transit system violations.



**Carmen Best, Assistant Chief,
Seattle Police Department**

4. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

Many refugees are resettling from countries whose cultures have different conceptions of gender roles and family power dynamics. Police agencies report that this can be a major source of confusion for refugees if they come from societies where domestic violence is not prohibited. "This is one of the biggest laws of which refugees may not be aware," said Borka Paponjak, the Resettlement & Placement Manager for the International Rescue Committee (Seattle area). "My sense is that these cases have been reduced since the Tukwila Police Department began to discuss the criminal consequences with refugees."

5. CHILD DISCIPLINE:

Similarly, many refugees come from countries where there are fewer laws regulating child abuse and neglect. Officers should explicitly explain the difference between legal corporal punishment and what constitutes abuse in the United States. Training also should include a discussion on the basic necessities that refugees must provide for their children in the United States, including shelter, education, clothing, and food. Many practitioner experts also said that officers should emphasize the difference between meeting children's needs versus giving into immature demands. (For more information on issues that arise related to confusion about child discipline, see "*Child Discipline and Empowering Positive Youth Development*" on page 28).



**Borka Paponjak, Resettlement &
Placement Manager, International Rescue
Committee, Seattle**

6. ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Police agencies may find that they need to cover additional topics at orientation that are particular to their jurisdictions. For example, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department talks about firearms at its "First Touch Training" for refugees, because Nevada is an open-carry state. Lieutenant Sasha Larkin added a conversation to the curriculum about the Second Amendment and relevant gun regulations, because refugees had told the police that seeing firearms made them fearful. LVMPD also conducts refugee orientation training in conjunction with the fire department, to share basic fire safety tips and information about how to call for fire department services.

Police agencies also should determine the most appropriate time to hold the initial training program for refugees, to ensure comprehension of the educational concepts. When refugees first arrive and are getting settled, they are inundated with new information, and it may be a difficult time to speak about

The Boise Police Department Shares Its Lesson Learned for How the Department Revamped Its Educational Efforts on Family Violence

In Boise, Idaho, the police department and its resettlement agency partners have worked together to create an innovative method to train refugees about domestic violence laws. “We found that we were having trouble connecting with people when we just gave them a list of things they couldn’t do and simply saying ‘because it’s illegal,’” said Dustin Robinson, Refugee Liaison Officer for the Boise Police Department.

Jodi Larson-Farrow, the Case Management Supervisor at the Boise Agency for New Americans (who works closely with BPD on their refugee outreach programming), thought it might be more productive to reframe the discussion from a human rights perspective instead. This is because, as she explained, all refugees share a common experience of having their human rights violated. Conversations about human rights begin in the resettlement orientation classes for refugees, and include a discussion about the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).²⁹ “I like to sit down with clients and ask what their interpretation of ‘respect’ is, and start the conversation there,” Larson-Farrow said. “In many cultures, it’s the elders, and in others, men hold the role of respect. I have that conversation, and also ask them what the cultural view of respect is in their home country. We start by slowly building this conversation, so we can establish a basic concept of respect in our family systems, because if we have that, we’re not going to have some of the larger problems with domestic violence.”

A typical introduction to discussing domestic violence in a training session in Boise might begin with a police officer saying the following:

In the United States, we have human rights that say we have the right to be free from physical injuries and free from violence. In the United States, you are all safe. No government, police, or military will ever try to hurt you for an unjust reason. How many of you here had to flee your country because of violence? I am sorry for that. And wouldn’t it have been good if, instead of violence, people could have sat down and talked to each other? You came to the U.S. for safety, and I am here to make sure people follow the rules to make sure you are free from crime and violence. That is a police officer’s job. I will do everything I can to make sure you are safe, and there is no violence. I have made a promise to this community that I would even lay down my life to make sure you are safe and protected. That is my promise to you as a guardian of this community.

In the United States, everybody is treated equally; it doesn’t matter if you are a refugee, or if you’re rich or poor. It doesn’t matter if you are black or white, and it doesn’t matter if you are Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. Everyone is treated equally. Your rights to not be hurt are as important as my rights, and we should all live free from violence. Raise your hands if you like the idea of being free from violence and never being hurt again.

Now, this is a very serious topic we want to talk about, and it will cause you to think. We all agree our bodies should be free from violence. And we agree that if we come to the United States as refugees, that we should be free from violence. We should also be free from violence if we are man or woman, correct? Well, we have a law in the United States that is called “domestic battery” or “domestic violence.” This is a law that says that it is illegal for one spouse (husband or wife) to beat the other. This is a law that is important, and a law that there is no exception for.³⁰

The Boise Police Department has found this new method of training to be its most promising practice from its experience working on educational efforts for crime prevention. “It wasn’t until we really started talking about human rights that the domestic violence discussion was effective,” Officer Robinson said.



**Dustin Robinson, Officer,
Boise Police Department**

29. See <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

30. Dustin Robinson, Boise Police Department, “Orientation Training for Refugees,” observed on Mar. 24, 2016.

complex legal issues. On the other hand, if a police department waits too long to conduct educational training, it could increase the likelihood that refugees may unwittingly become involved in a conflict in the community or violate the law. Participants at the September 22, 2016 meeting said that they deliver their initial training for refugees within a few weeks of their arrival, after refugees have settled into their new surroundings and built a relationship with their resettlement case manager. “Refugees will not have lots of questions for police if they’ve just arrived in the United States, but after two months or so, they will have lots of questions,” said Assistant Chief Mattie Provost of the Houston Police Department.

Follow-Up or Advanced Training

Finding ways to reinforce initial training is also critical for police agencies. For example, in Salt Lake City, the Chief of Police decided to deepen the agency’s engagement with refugees, following a police-involved shooting of a teenage refugee that sparked community protest.³¹ One lesson Salt Lake City police learned in the community dialogue sessions following the incident was that refugees who had undergone the orientation sessions still had limited familiarity with the criminal justice process. The incident prompted the department to conduct additional training for members in the community.

After refugees have lived in the United States for a significant period of time, there will be a need to cover specific topics in a more detailed manner than in the initial orientation training. The following are in-depth trainings that police agencies have offered for refugee members of their communities:

- In San Diego, the Multi-Cultural Storefront hosts a wide variety of specialized training for refugees. For example, a recent training hosted juvenile court personnel to talk about the juvenile justice system in San Diego, and public service attorneys who represent immigrant crime victims to talk about the warning signs for human trafficking.
- In Portland, the Portland Police Bureau has expanded its refugee training program to conduct follow-up sessions on drug laws, domestic violence, and gang prevention.
- Recognizing the need for a more specific discussion of positive child discipline methods, the Refugee Liaison Officer in Boise, Idaho participated in an advanced training on child discipline in conjunction with the Boise public school system.



**Josh Scharman, Deputy Chief,
Salt Lake City Police Department**

Cultural Considerations

Police Issues Stemming from Cultural Misunderstanding

Participants at the September 22, 2016 meeting did not express concern that refugees’ resettling in their cities would increase crime rates,³² but some said they have experienced new types of calls for service related to refugees’ integration. Police with a large number of refugees within their community should focus outreach, engagement and orientation efforts on providing cultural awareness for these newly resettled community members.

For example, in Portland, Oregon, police said that the most common issues for which they are called to respond to refugees are transportation-related. Initially, many refugees do not understand traffic laws or how to navigate the public transportation system; as a result, they come to the attention

31. See The Associated Press, Utah Police Were Justified in Shooting of Somali Teen Refugee, Prosecutor Says, (Aug. 8, 2016), available at <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/08/08/utah-police-were-justified-in-shooting-somali-teen-refugee-prosecutor-says.html>.

32. In fact, research has indicated that many communities experience a decrease in their crime rates following a large influx in refugee resettlement. New American Economy, “Is There a Link Between Refugees and U.S. Crime Rates?” (2017). <http://www.renewoureconomy.org/research/is-there-a-link-between-refugees-and-u-s-crime-rates/>.

of police for minor offenses like not purchasing a ticket for rides on public transit. These issues inspired the Portland Police Bureau to implement orientation training for refugees on U.S. laws in order to help prevent crime and equip refugees with tools to aid integration, said Lieutenant Jami Resch.

Other police departments have experienced other calls for service rooted in cultural misunderstandings. In Boise, the police department found that some refugees unwittingly became involved in low-level theft crimes due to different understandings of property ownership. Many refugees have spent years in refugee camps, where the cultural norm was that if you valued a piece of property and wanted to keep it, you would bring it inside your tent or dwelling, but items left outside could be shared. As a result, several refugees were under the false impression that bikes left outside of Boise residents' houses were unwanted property that they could claim, said the Refugee Liaison Officer Dustin Robinson. Like Portland, the Boise Police Department decided that refugee education programs can help prevent such crimes.

Establishing relationships with local resettlement agencies can greatly help police departments clear up potential misunderstandings. In one locality, a woman in a grocery store called the police saying that a stranger was trying to abduct her child, because a refugee had picked him up from her cart when he was crying. The refugee came from a culture in Africa where it is considered completely innocent to assist another woman with a crying baby. Staff at the International Rescue Committee—the resettlement agency sponsoring the woman—called the local police department, explained that the woman was their client, and cleared up the situation.

Building relationships among agencies assisting refugees can ameliorate potential issues stemming from refugees' abrupt relocation to a new culture. Police departments throughout the country are now undertaking educational campaigns to help refugees with the knowledge and skills they need for successful integration.

Cultural Competency Training and Education on What It Means to Be a Refugee

Cultural competency training is essential for police officers because it gives them the tools to effectively interact with refugees in the communities they serve. This training addresses misconceptions about refugees' cultural norms, clarifies the resettlement and clearance process, and informs officers of culturally-attuned practices that can aid them in their everyday duties.

The Tucson Police Department developed a brief information resource card for its officers to avoid misunderstandings when they encounter refugees in their community. Because of an Arizona state law (commonly referred to as "S.B. 1070"), officers may attempt to determine individuals' immigration status if there is reasonable suspicion they are present in the United States illegally.³³ The card informs officers that refugees have legal status in the United States and clarifies the type of documentation that refugees need to carry with them.

The San Diego Police Department has made cultural competency training for all of the various refugee cultures in San Diego mandatory for its officers. It tasked the Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office with creating a roll call video for the department that covers essential tips for understanding and interacting with refugees. SDPD tailored this training to the particular communities living in San Diego. For example, the San Diego training video tells officers not to consider it suspicious if they see drivers' licenses from Somali community members with a January 1 birth date, because many Somalis do not keep track of their day of actual birth and therefore are assigned that date when they move to the United States. "Community policing is more than a philosophy of engagement, it needs to recognize the individual ethnic groups and seek to understand them," said Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang of the San Diego Police Department.

33. See Police Executive Research Forum, *Local Police Perspectives on State Immigration Policy* (July 2014), available at http://www.policeforum.org/assets/docs/Free_Online_Documents/Immigration/local%20police%20perspectives%20on%20state%20immigration%20policies.pdf.

Some police departments turn to their resettlement agency partners to provide them with cultural competency training. The Baltimore Police Department, for instance, invited the International Rescue Committee (Maryland) into the Department's Compstat meetings, so that command staff could gain important knowledge about refugees in order to improve police operations. "When we began our refugee programming, the first thing we did was to work with the IRC to bring them into our Compstat meetings, in order to educate ourselves," said Major Richard Worley, former commander of the district where many refugees live.

The Baltimore Police Department also invited the International Rescue Committee into its roll call trainings to talk about a variety of issues, including cultural competency and best practices for engaging with community members who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Many Baltimore police officers had not previously understood the circumstances that result in people becoming refugees and the process that brought them to the United States. Once IRC staff explained the difficult circumstances that refugees have fled, the security protocols screening refugees coming to the U.S., and their legal immigration status, officers developed a deeper comprehension of the refugee community, which improved their delivery of services.

Some departments, such as the Portland Police Bureau, have also invited community members from various refugee groups to attend roll call meetings and to discuss cultural competency.

Training for Officers for Interacting with Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Participants at the September 22, 2016 meeting noted that their biggest barrier in communicating with refugees is the most obvious: language. Refugees come to the United States from all over the world, in many cases speaking languages that are rarely spoken in the United States. During times of stress, such as a police stop, an individual's ability to communicate in a non-native language (i.e., English) may diminish as well. As a result, police departments must ensure that their police officers comply with the requirement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act,³⁴ and provide language access to individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)³⁵ for interactions like interviews, traffic stops, and statements.

Police departments with a large refugee population in their community must train their officers on how to comply with their Language Access Plan. This means providing officers with tips for working with interpreters and clear guidance on when they must use an interpreter. "Ensuring that you provide interpreter services to refugees with Limited English Proficiency is a practical way for police to show that they take their relationship with refugees in the community seriously," said Ruben Chandrasekar, Executive Director of the International Rescue Committee (Maryland).

Officer Cristie Jacobsen, the Cultural Diversity Liaison of the Fargo Police Department, spearheaded an effort to ensure LEP compliance. Overall, the goal is to have the refugee understand officers' intent, so that they are not terrified and can comply with police directions. "By slowing things down through interpretation, you're building trust, enhancing the department's reputation and your relationship," said Jacobsen. "Using an interpreter adds time to your call, but the long-term benefit is huge."



**Richard Worley, Major,
Baltimore Police Department**

"Officers need to be cognizant of what happened to refugees, the conditions that brought them here. And now that they're here, what kind of support system do they have?"

**Lieutenant Sasha Larkin, Las Vegas
Metropolitan Police Department**

34. See <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview>.

35. See www.lep.gov for more information.



**Darryl McSwain, Assistant Chief,
Montgomery County (MD) Police
Department**

Police departments should ensure that they train officers not only on their legal requirements, but also provide common-sense tips for ensuring smooth integration of interpreters into their operations. For example:

- Speak to the individual, not to the interpreter (e.g., “What did you see?” versus “Ask him what he saw.”) In that way, you can establish eye contact and make a connection with the person, even though the interpreter will serve as an intermediary.
 - Only speak in a few sentences at a time, allowing time for interpreters to interpret.
 - It is acceptable to use interpreters to explain aspects of the person’s culture you might not understand, but never ask an interpreter to assess a person’s credibility or provide a personal opinion on the facts or the person.
- Be wary if the interpreter and subject spend a lot of time speaking back and forth with each other.
 - If you hear the interpreter use an English word (e.g., “domestic violence”), this may mean that word does not exist in the subject’s native language. Be sure that the interpreter then explains the concept behind the word.
 - When calling for an interpreter, provide contact information on whom to contact at the scene and any background the interpreter may need ahead of time.
 - List the interpreter as a witness in the police report.³⁶

Next Generation Issues

Police departments should be aware that after refugees have been living in the United States for several months or years, there are many additional issues that can arise. Integration of refugees into American communities is a long process, and the need for police support does not dissipate as soon as refugees begin working or attending school.

Participants at the PERE/Carnegie meeting in September 2016 discussed the common challenges they face related to refugees who have been in the United States for longer periods of time. While many departments across the United States have robust outreach efforts geared towards new arrivals, successful engagement must also include families at all stages of integration.



**Cristie Jacobsen, former
Cultural Liaison Officer
for the Fargo Police Department**

Child Discipline and Empowering Positive Youth Development

Participants identified child discipline issues as a significant challenge. Refugees may come from cultural backgrounds in which physical punishment is accepted as the primary means of disciplining children. After receiving education and hearing from the community about child abuse laws and potential consequences involving child protective agencies or immigration authorities, refugees may overcompensate and fail to provide any discipline to their children. “We’ve had instances where the kids seem to be in charge of their family, and threaten to call the police if their parents don’t give them whatever they want,” said Jodi Farrow-Larson.

Part of the reason for this dynamic is that refugee children typically adjust to U.S. culture faster than their parents.³⁷ This may include engaging

36. Adapted from Jodi Larson-Farrow, “Tips for Working with Interpreters,” presented on Sept. 22, 2016.

37. For more information on the success of refugee children in the United States, see Kate Hooper, Jie Zong, Randy Capps & Michael Fix, *Young Children of Refugees in the United States*, The Migration Policy Institute (Mar. 2016).

in behavior that is a break from their parents' culture, such as drinking alcohol. Refugee children also tend to learn English faster, which can alter the power structure in a family if parents are reliant on their children to interpret things like bills, school report cards, or conversations with other members of the community. Refugee youths' education, for example, can be hampered if parents must take their children's representations about their progress in school at face value.

To help alleviate some of this unbalance, officers should refrain from asking children to interpret for their parents during police contacts, unless there are exigent circumstances (for more information, see *“Training for Officers for Interacting with Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)”* on page 27).³⁸

Several police agencies have addressed positive child discipline as a training topic, not only in initial training for new arrivals, but for in-depth sessions with refugees who have been in the United States for a longer period of time. “We need to ensure we are finding ways to empower refugees—not just telling them what they cannot do, but giving concrete examples of how to discipline,” said Cristie Jacobsen of the Fargo Police Department. “We give them a host of options for what discipline methods they can use, and then let them choose which works best for their family.”

Informal Interventions to Reinforce Positive Youth Development

Several police departments also task their engagement or liaison officers with conducting informal interventions for refugee youths who cause trouble at school or home. Police often perform these informal interventions at the request of representatives from refugee resettlement agencies, who may also be present to help facilitate the conversation between officers and the refugee family.

“Many parents may not know what options they have. Much more than instances of child abuse, we see kids running the show in their families and neighborhoods.”

**Cristie Jacobsen, former
Cultural Liaison Officer
for the Fargo Police Department**

Sample Discipline Discussion Points for Refugee Parents

- **Talking about what is a “right,” versus what is a “privilege”:** Police can explain that children have rights to education, functional clothing, nutritional food, and shelter. Other things are privileges that can be taken away if children misbehave (e.g., TV, phone, Internet). Part of the conversation is making the *entire* family aware of what the law really requires—that parents are required to provide their children with necessities, but children do not have rights to property ownership until they are 18.
- **Chores:** Police should inform refugees that parents in the United States can require their children to help around the house.
- **Limitations on corporal punishment:** If refugee parents are going to use corporal punishment, it is important to use the proper terminology (i.e., refer to it as “spanking,” rather than “beating”). Police should inform refugees that if they engage in spanking, they must use an open palm and ensure that the spanking is gentle enough that it does not leave any marks at all.
- **Consistency:** Police trainers emphasize that regardless of what method of child discipline refugees use, it is important to start from a young age and to be consistent.³⁹

38. See for example, Susan Shah, Insha Rahman & Anita Kashu, Vera Institute of Justice, *Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement* (Feb. 2007), available at <https://www.vera.org/publications/overcoming-language-barriers-solutions-for-law-enforcement>.

39. Cristie Jacobsen, personal interview, Nov. 1, 2016.



**Kevin Hall, Captain,
Tuscon Police Department**

client was very afraid to speak with police and kept looking at the floor when talking about the prospect of meeting with a police officer. Robinson decided to take a softer approach with her, coming in plain-clothes and setting up the room ahead of time to ensure that there was one fewer chair than there were people planning to attend the meeting. Robinson then sat on the floor at the feet of the client to make her feel at ease. “By the end of the meeting, she was hugging him—which is incredibly rare in Burmese culture,” said Donnelly Tzul. “She really needed to see him as a person trying to help, and he had the intuition necessary to humanize himself for her.”

Empowering Refugees to Become Public Servants

The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing emphasizes the importance of recruiting many different people into police agencies, stating that “hiring officers who reflect the community they serve is important not only to external relations, but also to increasing understanding within the agency.”⁴⁰

Recruiting and hiring refugees proves challenging for many departments, however, because it requires bridging the gap in the lack of trust that many refugees may feel towards police. There can be other barriers to entry. Many refugees coming to the United States may lack formal education, for example.

Despite the challenges, police departments are employing creative means to encourage refugee recruitment. In Houston, Texas, for example, the Police Department was awarded a grant from the Mayor’s Office to hire 16 civilian liaisons from refugee and immigrant communities. Several departments have focused on developing interest in policing among refugee youths. Departments that conduct Youth Police Academies, Explorer Programs, and Police Athletic Leagues have reported success in encouraging recruitment as the result of that programming.

Other police departments have created special civilian positions, so refugees can serve in community engagement roles. The San Diego Police Department, for example, seeks to recruit uniformed officers as well as an entire team of civilians—many of whom are refugees—to liaise with the numerous refugee communities in the city. SDPD’s civilian “Police Service Officers” bring shared language and cultural understanding to the Department. (For more information, see “*The Multi-Cultural Storefront and PSOs*” on page 36.)



“In order to truly integrate, a community needs to become involved in local government and public service and have a say in policing themselves.”

**Assistant Chief Kris Arneson,
Minneapolis Police Department**

40. President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015), 51, https://cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/taskforce_finalreport.pdf.

Successful Recruitment and Professional Development Efforts: A Spotlight on the Minneapolis Police Department's Somali Officers

To reflect the diversity in its community, the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) has taken significant steps to recruit individuals from the Somali community in the greater Twin Cities area. As of the September 22, 2016 meeting, there were seven Somali police officers in MPD who are a part of the recently-formed Somali American Police Association.⁴¹

In order to gain a foothold in the Somali community, the police department first had to change the way it thought about recruitment. "If you're recruiting people who want to serve and engage with the community, you don't put up pictures of SWAT teams and guns," said Assistant Chief Kris Arneson. "Your outreach has to focus more on helping to improve the community, rather than some of more old-school ways of attracting people into policing."

Getting to a point where there was a critical mass of Somali officers was not easy. Sergeant Abdiwahab Ali of the MPD shared how it felt to be one of the first Somali officers on the force:

At first, it was a challenge to never see someone that looked like me on the force. And before I became a citizen, it was very difficult to completely say 'This is my home,' and forget about my luggage. I was thinking, 'Is this really my home? Is it safe to be here? And is this a nice home?' Now I can definitively say that this is my home and I am a member of society. And once I became a police officer, I felt like a part of a whole new community.



**Abdiwahab Ali, Sergeant,
Minneapolis Police Department**

Minneapolis places a special emphasis on exposing Somali youth to policing, including a Somali Youth Police Academy. Similar to the San Diego Police Department, MPD has also hired Somalis in the community to serve in Community Service Officer positions, which allow these individuals to experience the department prior to the Academy and provides income and a career path while recruits attend college.

Somali officers in Minneapolis have discovered that the community is accepting of their role and appreciates the ability to connect with the Department through them. "At the beginning when I got hired, I was thinking I might get some pushback from the community. But I noticed that the community was very welcoming," said Sergeant Abdiwahab Ali. "Because I am reaching out to be liaison for them, they can easily come to me and ask questions about what it's like on this side. They then have more information than they had before, and a better understanding of how the system works."

41. See Libor Jany & Nicole Norfleet, Minneapolis Police's Somali Outreach Gets National Attention, The Minneapolis Star Tribune (Jan. 28, 2015), available at <http://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-police-s-somali-outreach-gets-national-attention/290017061/>.

An Officer Who Was Himself a Refugee

Having a police officer who came to the United States as a refugee helps to give all members of the department an understanding of refugee communities, as well as insight into the difficult journey that refugees make to come to the United States. Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang of the San Diego Police Department led the Multi-Cultural Community Relations Division and helped deepen the Department's competency through sharing his own story as a Hmong refugee.

“I want to share a story with you. It’s about a young man and his journey from Laos to a refugee camp to the United States. During the fall of Saigon in May 1975, all of the indigenous group, the Hmong, that lives up in the country of Laos along the Ho Chi Minh trail were being persecuted because of their part in what is called “The Secret War.” Every family that had the ability and the will came together to plan escape routes into Thailand.

A young man, along with his three brothers, one sister and parents, traveled three nights through the rainforest, terrains, and hillsides. Their journey on the fourth day came to a river’s edge, the Mekong River, one of the deadliest and longest rivers that separates Thailand and Laos. I say deadly because tens of thousands of people have died in that river—all because of their effort to try to cross. Boat people would take the families midway, capsize the boat, and every life was lost.

This young man’s family was able to make their way into the river’s edge, travelling by night and being hunted down by daytime. If they were spotted, they would be executed. No questions, no ransom, no payment. That was the order. Two families: this young man’s family, and the father’s best friend’s family, went onto the boats. They swapped the two eldest sons, so if one boat capsized, the other one will live on to carry the family name.

Early morning on the fifth day, they emerged on the Thailand shore. The young man would spend the next three years in a refugee camp, living through the filth, poverty, and deplorable conditions that he would not wish on anyone. Fast forward to 1978, the young man and his family had an opportunity to resettle to the United States, sponsored by a Catholic charity New Mexico. With God’s good fortune, the family, every one, made it alive, and they are here in the United States. The young man is here before you today.”



**Paul Yang, Sergeant,
San Diego Police Department**

Navigating a Complex Political Environment

With recent developments regulating the refugee program at the national level, one increasing challenge for state and local police is how to navigate the complicated political environment surrounding refugee resettlement. On January 27, 2017, President Donald Trump suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (URAP) for 120 days, so that relevant federal agencies could conduct a security review to ensure that “those approved for refugee admission do not pose a threat to the security and welfare of the United States.”⁴² The President’s January 27 Executive Order was stayed by a panel of the 9th Circuit U.S. Court

42. The White House. “Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” January 27: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>.

of Appeals. On March 6, the President released a more limited Executive Order,⁴³ which was also struck down.⁴⁴ Under the Trump Administration’s plan, the maximum number of refugees relocated in the U.S. will likely decline to 50,000.⁴⁵

The President’s Executive Orders followed a public debate about the future of the United States’ role in resettling refugees, particularly those fleeing the conflict in Syria.⁴⁶ French authorities found a Syrian refugee passport at the scene of the Paris Terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015,⁴⁷ fueling concerns about terrorists’ exploitation of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Community and resettlement partners at the PERF/Carnegie meeting talked about how the political environment has affected their work. “I’ve been doing resettlement for 14 years, and we always enjoyed bipartisan support for the refugee program,” said Jennifer Doran-Pena of the International Rescue Committee and State Refugee Coordinator for Kansas. With communities expressing concerns about safety and national security in light of the Syrian crisis, refugee resettlement agencies note a decline in support of their organizations. “It wasn’t until last year that life as we know it changed considerably, and there’s been a lot of undermining of support for the refugee program in the United States. It’s quite a different time for us and it affects us on a local level.”

In the midst of this turmoil, communities have turned towards their state and local police agencies for guidance. This is because police agencies often represent trusted authorities for communities on public safety issues. PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler said, “Law enforcement has a powerful and calming voice in this debate.” Police echoed this sentiment. “It has always been the job of police to reduce fear in the community,” said Assistant Chief Scott Hoffman of the Missoula Police Department.

Police officials at the PERF/Carnegie meeting said it is well within their role to dispel fears that some in their communities might have about accepting refugees. Because dedicated outreach officers gain an extensive education on refugees, they are often able to correct misconceptions in the community. “We need to learn to dispel bad rumors. If there’s fear among the community, we’re not doing our job. Regarding our Congolese refugees in Missoula, we need to help our other residents understand that they have been vetted. They have gone through a process [to be allowed into the United States]. We’re there as an educator,” said Assistance Chief Scott Hoffman, of the Missoula (MT) Police Department.

State and local police also have an important role to play in the event of hate crimes against refugees. Several agencies have increased security checks at resettlement agencies and refugee businesses,



**Gavin Seiler, Deputy Chief,
Wichita Police Department**



**Jennifer Doran-Pena, Statewide Refugee
Coordinator, International Rescue
Committee, Kansas**

“Law enforcement is a neutral party, but we can clarify facts. So much of the negative information out there has to do with misinformation on the part of the community.”

**Officer Cristie Jacobsen,
Fargo Police Department**

43. The White House. “Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” March 6:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/06/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>.

44. See Alexander Burns, 2 Federal Judges Rule Against Trump’s Latest Travel Ban, The New York Times (Mar. 15, 2017), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/us/politics/trump-travel-ban.html>.

45. See Jens Manual Krogstad & Jynnah Radford, Pew Research Center, “Key Facts About Refugees to the U.S.,” (Jan. 30, 2017), available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/30/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>.

46. See Janell Ross, The Politics of the Syrian Refugee Crisis, Explained, The Washington Post (Sept. 11, 2015), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/11/the-politics-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-explained/?utm_term=.035e49443df7.

47. Christiane Amanpour & Thom Patterson, Passport Linked to Terrorist Complicates Syrian Refugee Crisis, CNN (Nov. 15, 2015), available at <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/15/europe/paris-attacks-passports/>.



**Scott Hoffman, Assistant Chief,
Missoula (MT) Police Department**

which have seen an increase in threats. For example, in Fargo, following the vandalism and attempted arson of a Somali restaurant, Officer Jacobsen held a large informational session with Muslim refugees in the community talking about the First Amendment and role of the press. Many refugees felt aggrieved about incorrect assertions in the media and wanted legal recourse. Jacobsen discussed with the group that “public opinion changes, and people who write in or comment on news articles represent just one individual’s perspective.”

Jacobsen also reinforced Fargo’s commitment to providing safety and security to refugees in the community, and provided guidance on safety when refugees are confronted with hate speech. She went to refugee businesses, passing out her card and ensuring that everyone felt safe. Fargo police also increased their patrols in locations where refugees gather, particularly at mosques.

Refugee Outreach and Engagement in the Field: Case Studies from Police Agencies

The San Diego Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office

San Diego, California is a well-established refugee resettlement community in the United States. San Diego County accepts more refugees than any other county in California and resettled more than 2,000 refugees in the 2016 fiscal year,⁴⁸ which accounts for approximately three to four percent of overall U.S. resettlement.⁴⁹ In response to recent political controversies surrounding refugees, San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer said, “I am confident we can strengthen America’s security without shutting America’s doors.”⁵⁰

Because of San Diego’s historical commitment to welcoming refugees, the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) has had robust refugee engagement programming for 30 years. Between 1975 and 1987, more than 31,000 refugees resettled in San Diego. During that initial wave of resettlement, the San Diego Police Department decided that it needed to engage with the community. Police noted that refugees were being victimized by criminal offenders disproportionately to their numbers in the community. Some of the victimization came from within the refugee communities, while other crimes were committed by persons outside the refugee cultures. Many of the crimes were not being reported to police.

To alleviate those concerns, the Police Department decided to build a program to provide services to refugees. It



Representatives from the San Diego Police Department’s Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office at the PERF September 22, 2016 meeting.

48. Kate Morrissey, San Diego Refugee Number Boom, The San Diego Union-Tribune (Sept. 27, 2016), available at <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/sd-me-record-refugees-20160927-story.html>.

49. Megan Burks, Syrians Could Soon Be Next Refugee Group to Call San Diego Home, KPBS (Aug. 26, 2015), available at <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2015/aug/26/syrians-could-soon-be-next-refugee-group-call-san/>.

50. Joshua Stewart, Faulconer Criticizes Trump Refugee Ban, The San Diego Union-Tribune (Jan. 31, 2017), available at <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/politics/sd-me-faulconer-travel-20170131-story.html>.

established the Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office (originally also known as the Indo-Chinese Storefront and now the Multi-Cultural Storefront) in 1987. The Multi-Cultural Storefront is a physical location that houses SDPD's Multi-Cultural Community Relations Unit. It was developed to engage and build trust with the various refugee communities in the city, through non-enforcement interactions with the department.

The Multi-Cultural Storefront is part of SDPD's Mid-City Division. This is because many of San Diego's refugees live in the Mid-City district of the city, one of San Diego's most diverse neighborhoods, and SDPD wanted the center of its multicultural outreach activities to be in the same place that refugees and other migrants live. Indeed, the neighborhood is so diverse that the motto of SDPD's Mid-City Division is "policing the world in the middle of the city."

Community Policing Philosophy

The core of SDPD's community engagement philosophy is "culturally competent customization." In other words, community engagement is tailored to each community's needs.

"We start by recognizing the individual ethnic group and seeking to understand the cultures, languages, and religious practices," said Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang, former Director of the Multi-Cultural Community Relations Division. "We strive to cultivate a close relationship with each individual community to let them know that we care, and also to legitimize what we do as a police organization."

Lieutenant Yang describes the four elements of SDPD's overarching community policing philosophy:

- **Empowerment** – Giving responsibility back to the community leaders through involvement in community boards and communities;
- **Enhancement** – Valuing the importance of elders in the community;
- **Enable** – Allowing community leaders to have a voice in how they are policed; and
- **Engagement** – Recognizing community leaders in a formal setting.

"With refugee programming, it's just like developing a solution. It has to be tailored and specific to the needs of the particular community."

**Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang,
San Diego Police Department**

According to SDPD command staff, customizing their outreach initiatives to particular segments of the community has proven effective, because it allows them to best meet community members' diverse needs. "Once you break down your engagement strategy to individual communities, you realize that one solution does not fix all problems, and you need to make your outreach more intimate," said Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis.

The Multi-Cultural Storefront and PSOs

SDPD's Multi-Cultural Storefront is staffed by one sergeant, nine Police Service Officers (PSOs), and numerous volunteers.

PSOs are not sworn officers. They are trusted leaders recruited from within San Diego's refugee communities, who serve as community liaisons. For example, there are PSOs dedicated to working with the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Somali communities. PSOs are bilingual (and are certified as translators by the city) and are a part of the culture and community that they represent. They provide translation services for SDPD, participate in community events as representatives of SDPD, and help community members navigate the police department and city government. Because the PSOs are leaders within their refugee communities and are seen as an extension of the police, they help to build trust between the community and SDPD.

While the cultural competency of the nine Police Service Officers helps the police department to "get a foot in the door" of a community, ultimately, officers' open-mindedness, persistence, and willingness to learn are what make an outreach initiative successful. "You don't have to have to be of the same background to engage with people, you just need to understand and care about the people you serve," said SDPD's Acting Lieutenant Paul Yang. "If you don't fully understand a culture, you need to do a little homework to understand peoples' suffering and their struggles."

In San Diego's experience, providing tailored services to refugees and building strong relationships with them has prevented crime and neighborhood problems. In response to concerns about potential underreporting of crime in refugee communities, for instance, the police department tasked its PSOs with guiding crime victims through the reporting process. PSOs are authorized to take police reports from members of the community, which makes crime victims more comfortable reporting (and therefore more likely to do so), and ensures that the police have a more accurate picture of crime in the community. "Because of the Storefront, we have direct contact with segments of the community that—if no relationships were in place—we wouldn't have the ability to reach," said Assistant Chief of Police Todd Jarvis.

Despite difficult budgetary constraints, the Department has decided that keeping its Police Service Officer staff is a top priority. SDPD finds that community members proactively bring issues to the PSOs. PSOs have been so effective in building trust with community members that many refugees come to the Storefront for assistance with non-police matters. For example, refugees—the majority of whom live close to the Storefront—often walk in off the street and ask the PSOs for help with everyday issues such as translating a utility bill. While minor on the surface, this kind of everyday aid is critical to successfully integrating refugees into the larger civic community and making them feel welcome and supported in their new home. PSOs also help refugees in need by connecting them to nonprofits that provide a wide variety of services, such as legal aid and employment services.

A typical day at the Multi-Cultural Storefront: A typical day at the Storefront begins with a meeting in which the Sergeant recounts the police-involved incidents that happened in the city during the previous day. The Sergeant and Police Service Officers then discuss whether they might be able to provide assistance, such as translation services, or connecting investigators with community leaders. This information-sharing also keeps the PSOs informed about current crime trends in the city. The PSOs share the crime information, along with prevention strategies, with their communities. For example, at one point Cambodian businesses specifically were being targeted for fraud. Having learned about this as a result of their briefings, the PSOs talked to business owners in the Cambodian community about the fraud and the security measures that they could take to protect themselves.

Internal outreach: Acting Lieutenant Yang also implemented an internal outreach initiative within the San Diego Police Department. Its goal is to inform SDPD officers about the resources available to the department through the Multi-Cultural Community Relations Office, and how SDPD can use the Office on cases involving multi-cultural communities. "Once officers see that, 'This contact went a lot better this week,' leaning on our experts' cultural expertise will become a part of what they do," said Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis.

Training Workshops: The Multi-Cultural Storefront also hosts a wide variety of community workshops and trainings. Some of these trainings are held at the Storefront itself, and others are held at community centers and other venues in the neighborhood. Training topics have included gang prevention, home and business security, neighborhood watches, domestic violence, sexual assault, and programs for youths at risk of delinquency or gang recruitment. The Storefront recruits subject matter experts in each topic, from within and outside the Department, to deliver the trainings. Within the context of refugee engagement, San Diego police have learned that it is best



Police Service Officer Phet Guiney attending a community event in San Diego.

"San Diego is a diverse city, and it can be difficult to grasp all of the nuances involved in all of the different cultures we have—who to speak with, how to interact, how to approach refugees. We are asking a lot of our officers, so it is crucial that we educate ourselves and also educate the community on what we're up against, what are goals are, and what we're trying to accomplish."

**Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis,
San Diego Police Department**



Multi-Cultural Storefront staff conducting a training for refugees.

to ask refugees to name training topics that would be most useful, rather than assuming to know. “We don’t dictate what they’re going to learn about at a workshop, and we feel that is critical for refugees who are often used to the government telling them what to think,” Lieutenant Yang said.

Community Events: The officers and Police Service Officers from the Multi-Cultural Storefront also participate in a multitude of community events. “It’s not only important to bring the community to you, we need to also integrate ourselves in the community,” Lieutenant Yang said. To that end, Storefront staff members attend religious ceremonies, family gatherings, New Year celebrations, community fundraising events, and other social gatherings.

Because of its outreach mission, it is difficult to quantify the Multi-Cultural Storefront’s performance. But the Police Department does track the number of people who sign into the Storefront for services, the number of crime reports that Police Service Officers take, and the numbers of community events that Police Department employees attend. The clearest indication of SDPD’s success, however, has come from positive community feedback. “When we hear from the community saying how happy they are with the Storefront, we know we are doing something right,” said Captain Mike Hastings, commander of the Mid-City Division.

Advisory Boards and Youth Programs

The Storefront’s Police Service Officers are also tasked with coordinating efforts of two formal programs: SDPD’s Advisory Boards, and its Youth Programs.

Advisory Boards: San Diego police have created a host of Advisory Boards to represent refugee communities and to bring the police department and the community together for in-depth policy discussions. There are Advisory Boards for the Vietnamese/Indochinese, Lao, Cambodian, Hmong, and East African communities in San Diego. Because refugee communities may not have detailed knowledge of police work or criminal justice policy, the Advisory Boards are essential mechanisms for the police department to promote understanding with the community. They also give the various communities an opportunity to communicate their concerns to the police department and to help develop coordinated strategies to address their issues.

The Advisory Boards meet twice a month. They are comprised of community members and leaders from religious institutions, cultural centers, and businesses. “Our biggest requirement is that board members must be individuals that people in the community listen to,” said Lieutenant Yang. The Advisory Board members are extremely knowledgeable about their communities, making them an invaluable resource for police policy makers. “We would not know nearly enough about what is going on in the community without these individuals,” Yang said.

There is also a larger board—the Chief’s Advisory Board for the Chief of Police and Captains—that meets quarterly to discuss common concerns across the Department. Its purpose is to bring issues to the attention of the Chief and give her the opportunity to adjust policies and practices, while ensuring that all communities understand the reasoning behind her decision-making. “She listens to all of our complaints and explains to all of the communities



San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman presenting a community leadership award to Abraham To, Chairman of the Vietnamese/Indochinese Advisory Board.

present why certain policies or actions were taken,” said Abraham To, Chairman of the Vietnamese/Indochinese Advisory Board. The Chief then assigns action items to the corresponding Captain to resolve efficiently.

Youth Programs: The Storefront’s PSOs also coordinate several programs for young refugees in San Diego, to encourage personal development and support their integration into the community. The purpose of the youth programs is to “provide mentorship, role models, leadership skills, life skills, and education about civic involvement,” Lieutenant Yang said. Currently, there is a Southeast Asian Youth Program and an East African Youth Program.

SDPD’s youth programs also aim to prevent crime by steering young people away from criminal activity. The youth programs include workshops discussing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), how to deal with changes in family structure, the American education system, drug abuse, and gang prevention.

Civic engagement is also an essential component of the police department’s youth programming. “We want to help kids understand that it is important to give back to our community. Our ultimate goal is to empower them to continue to stay away from at risk behaviors, to continue with their educational goals, and to become responsible and productive members of our community, long after they leave our program,” said Phet Guiney, PSO and coordinator of the Southeast Asian Youth Program. To that end, youth programs organize community cleanups, visits to museums that promote culture and understanding (e.g., The Museum of Tolerance), and also events that allow the kids to have fun (e.g., boat rides).

Police leaders also consider this youth programming an effective recruitment tool. “The youth programs are so important, because it can be challenging to get recruits out of the newer refugee communities,” Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis said. The Youth Programs encourage interested refugees to participate in the Cadet program, which is a stepping-stone that sometimes leads to joining the police force.

The “Walking Team”

In 2013, the San Diego Police Department created a “Walking Team” for its Mid-City district, which comprises two patrol officers who help build relationships with community members in that multi-cultural neighborhood. Historically, that district had a high crime rate, and many residents’ only contacts with the police were in an enforcement context. The Walking Team’s original mandate was to conduct a foot patrol to develop relationships and network with business owners and community service providers in the area. “I felt we were missing out on a lot of potential to interact and positively influence newer refugee and immigrant communities by not taking the first step to reach out to them where they work, shop, and go to school,” said Assistant Chief Jarvis. Under the command of the Crime Suppression Team, the Walking Team checked in with local stores and chatted with community members in public spaces, with the goal of getting to know them in a non-confrontational setting.

Soon, however, the Walking Team began to face challenges in building relationships with communities, because they lacked the ability to follow up on criminal complaints or reports. Community members felt frustrated with officers who conducted engagement exclusively. “The community does not want you to just show your face and shake hands with them; you must actually do what you promise in order to build trust,” said Officer Mark Knutson, one of the members of the Walking Team. Officer Knutson got approval from his command staff to amend the duties of the walking team to also include some enforcement efforts. Team members do not have to respond to radio calls, but they can take police reports from community members and follow up on investigations. To that end, the team now has a patrol car to help improve their efficiency.

“We view this type of engagement as a mandate in current modern policing. Outreach is not a luxury, it is a mandatory piece of the puzzle.”

**Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis,
San Diego Police Department**



**Phet Guiney, Police Service Officer,
San Diego Police Department**

While the specific duties of the Walking Team have changed, the Team’s overall goal—to build trust with the community—has stayed the same. In one situation, gang members were congregating and engaging in criminal activity in front of a shopping complex, in which Somali business owners owned and operated a restaurant. The business owners talked to the Walking Team, because the gang members were loitering, using drugs, and harassing customers, which hurt business. Because of this tip from the community, the Walking Team has been proactive about addressing neighborhood issues through citations and arrest. “It helped demonstrate our commitment to the Somali community and show that we were listening to them,” said Officer Knutson.

The department has learned through the implementation of the Walking Team that flexibility and commitment are essential elements of engaging with refugee and migrant communities. “Our lesson learned from restructuring the Walking Team is that you have to have patience. Police departments working with refugees need to understand that trust does not happen overnight, and they have to be prepared for a long-term investment. But ultimately, that investment will pay off,” said Assistant Chief Todd Jarvis. The department reports positive feedback from both its officers and refugee or immigrants community members in the Mid-City district.

San Diego Police Department Summary of Lessons Learned After 30 Years of Refugee Engagement Programming

- Police departments must have a firm commitment to making outreach and engagement happen, and to working with refugee communities. Efforts cannot be halfway measures.
- Events and programming should be at a location accessible to the community.
- To the greatest extent possible, it is helpful to have officers, police staff members, or volunteers who can speak the languages used in each community.
- The entire department needs to receive educational training, because a false step by one officer may unintentionally undermine the good work of the department. Cultural competency training needs to be a long-term commitment.
- Go into communities for training workshops on topics like gang prevention or home security.

Boise, Idaho's Refugee Liaison Unit

Refugee Resettlement in Boise, Idaho

Boise, Idaho started accepting refugees in the 1970s, and the city has grown into a major resettlement area in the United States. Following the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980, Boise has resettled more than 19,000 refugees from approximately 50 countries around the globe.⁵¹ Boise has also accepted more Syrian refugees than New York City and Los Angeles combined.⁵²

There are three major resettlement agencies in Boise that operate under the direction of the Idaho Office for Refugees: the Boise Agency for New Americans, the International Rescue Committee (Boise), and World Relief (Boise). These three agencies provide wrap-around case management services for Boise refugees, from greeting them at the airport to job placement services. The Idaho Office for Refugees also runs an English Language Center where refugees can take their required English language and cultural orientation classes.

In August 2015, stakeholders in Boise released the Neighbors United initiative, a six-point plan for achieving successful refugee integration into the community.⁵³ The six elements are education, employment, healthcare, housing, social integration, and transportation. "We offer these same programs to all Boiseans," wrote Boise Mayor David Bieter of the city's efforts. "We don't debate about who is more worthy or where they're from. We are a welcoming city. We all have work to do."⁵⁴

Creation of the Boise Police Department's Refugee Liaison Unit

Shelli Sonnenberg-Wardle was the first Refugee Liaison Officer in Boise, a position that grew organically within the Boise Police Department (BPD) around 2007. Sonnenberg-Wardle had been a Neighborhood Contact Officer at BPD, primarily responsible for community policing initiatives, and she was assigned to a neighborhood where many refugees lived. Sonnenberg-Wardle began noticing a pattern of calls for service from refugees: Many calls were related to cultural misunderstandings or miscommunications, or the refugees' lack of experience with U.S. laws. Refugees were coming from countries and cultures that had different understandings of family relationships, individual rights, and property ownership; and they had little experience with alcohol. This lack of knowledge and experience with U.S. culture and laws resulted in public safety issues like DUIs, minor thefts, and domestic violence. Sonnenberg-Wardle brought these issues to the attention of Police Department leaders, discussing the patterns she noticed.

In response, BPD created a dedicated position to proactively address these issues. Sonnenberg-Wardle was tapped to fill this position, becoming the department's first Refugee Liaison Officer. The position is located within the Community Outreach Bureau.

Sonnenberg-Wardle's first task was to work with the three resettlement agencies in the community. She was able to secure a block of time during the initial refugee orientation sessions to explain the basics



The Boise Police Department's Detective Shelli Sonnenberg-Wardle participating in a child immunization clinic for refugees in Boise.

51. Bill Dentzer, *Refugees in Idaho Find Both Success, Opposition*, Idaho Statesman, Jul. 11, 2015, available at <http://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/article40868937.html>.

52. Haeyoun Park & Rudy Omri, U.S. Reaches Goal of Admitting 10,000 Syrian Refugees. Here's Where They Went, New York Times (Aug. 31, 2016), available at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/30/us/syrian-refugees-in-the-united-states.html?_r=1.

53. See <http://neighborsunitedboise.org/> for more information.

54. David H. Bieter, Op-Ed, President, Congress Get to Determine Immigration—But Mayors Actually Make It Work, The Idaho Statesman (Dec. 8, 2016), available at <http://www.idahostatesman.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article119706333.html>.

of United States laws. Sonnenberg-Wardle credits the resettlement agencies with giving her essential knowledge and connections, which allowed her to meaningfully engage with refugees. “Through them, I had my foot in the door to meet refugees and learn about their cultures,” she said.

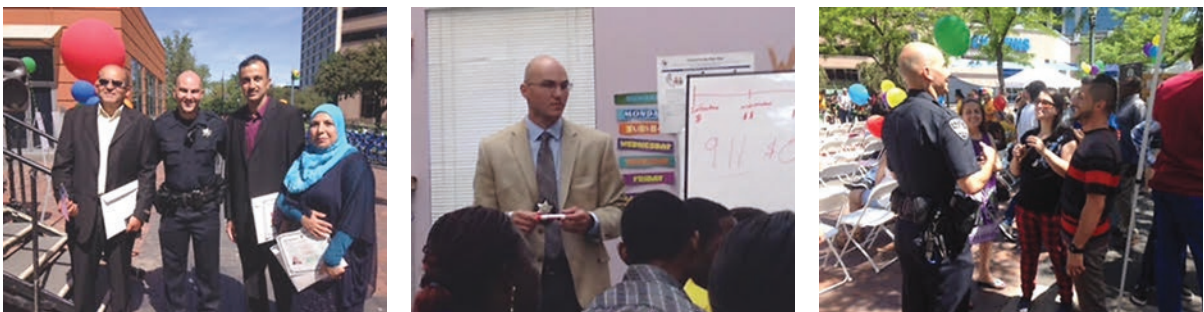
Sonnenberg-Wardle also forged relationships with community leaders and worked with them to resolve community problems. For example, after a large community of Somali Bantu refugees moved to Boise, police started noticing minor issues with their youths, including spray painting graffiti and staying out past the city’s curfew for persons under age 18. Sonnenberg-Wardle learned that it was important to the Somali Bantu community for the police department to respect their traditional model of conflict resolution that had been an important aspect of their culture for thousands of years. *Xeer* is a form of justice in which a delegation of clan elders resolve disputes within a community with compensation to victims.⁵⁵ Sonnenberg-Wardle demonstrated respect for this tradition by reaching out to clan elders. She told them that while there would be many instances where the police department might not be able to turn a case over the council, she would keep them abreast of all departmental decisions affecting the community. Sonnenberg-Wardle also began a system to turn over cases to the council in instances where the department was exercising its discretion not to arrest or issue a citation (e.g., youths breaking curfew).

The program was a success, and the Refugee Liaison Officer became a permanent position in the Boise Police Department. Sonnenberg-Wardle was able to build relationships with refugees in Boise to the point where she became “Officer Shelli,” and was often requested by name. This success led the department to expand the department’s outreach to refugees through advanced training sessions, informal interventions for at-risk youth, and deeper cultural engagement.

Expansion of the Refugee Liaison Officer’s Responsibilities and Engagement

In 2015, William Bones was appointed Chief of Police in Boise. Chief Bones has furthered the police department’s refugee outreach initiatives, including ensuring their continuation despite a tight budget. For Chief Bones, maintaining the Refugee Liaison Unit was a matter of service. “Police departments are an extension of the communities... they serve,”⁵⁶ he said. So the Department created the position to work directly with refugees to “better understand the troubles and trials a refugee faces as they attempt to integrate into our community.”⁵⁷

Officer Dustin Robinson was tasked as the dedicated Refugee Liaison Officer after Officer Sonnenberg-Wardle received a promotion and has overseen an expansion of outreach programming. Robinson’s first task, like Sonnenberg-Wardle, was to forge close relationships with staff from the refugee



Officer Dustin Robinson with community members (LEFT), at an orientation training for refugees (MIDDLE), and talking about his role with the Boise Police Department at a community event (RIGHT).

55. See Louisa Lombard, “How Somalia’s Aged Tribal Justice System Keeps the Peace in Country Known for Chaos.” *Legal Affairs* (Sept./Oct. 2005), available at http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/September-October-2005/scene_lombard_sepoct05.msp.

56. Address to Boise City Club by Chief William Bones, June 30, 2015.

57. <http://police.cityofboise.org/home/specialty-units/refugee-liaison/>.

resettlement agencies. He approached leadership at all three refugee resettlement agencies in Boise to discuss how they could work together, what the agencies needed from the BPD, and what he could learn about the various cultures resettling in Boise.

PARTNERING WITH RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES

Because resettlement agencies have close relationships with refugees, they can help police to “get their foot in the door” in making initial contacts with refugees. For example, Jodi Larson-Farrow, the Case Management Supervisor for Boise’s Agency for New Americans, invited Officer Robinson to join in a yoga class she organized, so that he could meet clients who might have been hesitant to engage with a police officer in a more formal setting.

Refugee resettlement organizations are also instrumental partners for helping police build trust over time with refugee community members. Julianne Donnelly Tzul, Director of the International Rescue Committee (Boise), said, “It is important to paint police in a positive light for refugees from the outset.” Resettlement staff members explain the role of police to all incoming refugees and show them a picture of Officer Robinson before he begins his presentation during the refugee orientation program, and tells the refugees that they can go to Robinson with any issue.

Robinson credits the refugee resettlement agencies for teaching him about the various cultures arriving in Boise, and said he shares what he has learned with the rest of the department at cultural competency training sessions.

The partnerships with resettlement representatives have also greatly assisted Boise’s ability to improve police operations. For example, generally at least twice a year, one of the new refugee arrivals will come to the attention of the police because they get lost and cannot remember their address, the name of their case manager, or relevant phone numbers. “Dustin will take a picture on his phone of the person, send it out to all of us resettlement staff, and in 5 minutes we can get our client safely back home,” said Donnelly Tzul. BPD worked with the refugee resettlement agencies to create a card for refugees to carry, listing their name, address, sponsoring resettlement agency, and language(s) spoken.

Importantly, this information-sharing goes both ways and improves how resettlement agencies function. It is helpful for the resettlement agencies to have a direct connection with someone in the police department. With the Refugee Liaison Officer’s assistance, resettlement staff can learn the facts of incidents that involve their clients, ask questions about the criminal justice process or relevant laws, and help introduce an alternative path for refugee youths who may be at-risk for criminal activity.

EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

As in many other cities, one of the mainstays of refugee outreach in Boise is an emphasis on education. Educational training for refugees has proven an effective method for *preventing* crime and conflict, and helping to support larger integration efforts.

This educational effort is under the umbrella of a holistic, multi-stakeholder “Neighbors United” plan in Boise. The Neighbors United plan calls for efforts to “reduce the incidence of legal issues with refugees through early education about the US and Idaho legal systems.”⁵⁸ This objective requires BPD to:

- Engage refugees to participate in the Citizens Police Academy;
- Create multiple avenues for communicating laws and consequences of breaking them in a way refugees can understand and adhere to;
- Conduct training programs for refugees on how to interact with police and the use of the 911 resource; and
- Involve refugees willing to speak on their encounters with the law.⁵⁹

58. See http://www.neighborsunitedboise.org/Neighbors_United_Strategic_Community_Plan_Aug_2015.pdf.

59. *Ibid.* at 19.

New cultural orientation for refugees is an important time for police to begin initial educational efforts, according to Robinson. Cultural orientation in Boise is held at the English Language Center, and the police department has a two-hour block to educate refugees about the role of police and the U.S. legal system. The goal of initial training is to address the most important information that refugees need when they first arrive in the United States. These training topics are:

- The role of police in the United States, including an explanation that offering gifts to police officers is illegal and unacceptable;
- How to request emergency services, including:
 - How to call 911;
 - The fact that 911 is free of charge;
 - How to request an interpreter from a dispatcher; and
 - Appropriate use of 911.
- Basic information on bicycle laws (a popular mode of transportation for refugees in Boise);
- Basic information on driving rules, including:
 - The fact that a driver’s license is required;
 - How to respond if a police officer conducts a traffic stop; and
 - How to handle a ticket or driving citation.
- Child discipline, including:
 - The difference between corporal punishment and abuse; and
 - Alternative suggestions of means for child discipline.
- Family violence from a human rights perspective (*for more information, see sidebar, “The Boise Police Department Shares Its Lesson Learned for How the Department Revamped Its Educational Efforts on Family Violence”*).⁶⁰

The Importance of Tone: Officer Robinson begins cultural orientation training by welcoming the refugees on behalf of the police department, telling them how happy he is that they are in the United States and that they are safe. He then explains that in the United States, policing is an honorable profession and that refugees will have opportunities to see police officers out in the community to positively interact with them.

Robinson frames discussion about U.S. laws in a non-accusatory manner that acknowledges that refugees often have good intentions but are simply unaware of legal requirements. For example, when talking about petty theft or personal property laws, Robinson may say: “And we talk about this because nobody in this room is a bad person or wants to break the law, but you need to know what would be considered theft or stealing in our country.”

A Personal Style: Robinson also finds it effective to talk to the refugees about his own life and experiences in the United States. For example, when talking about the difference between child discipline and child abuse, Robinson challenges refugees to think beyond a common question he receives from refugees: how do you teach your son to “be a man.”

“I think it is powerful for them to see me as a police officer, a traditionally macho profession, and talk about how I was raised without any physical violence,” said Robinson. Robinson also talks about his family dynamics at home, describing how he and his wife juggle their careers and their family responsibilities. Of course, it is not necessary for all police officers to talk about their personal lives in order to convey the information that refugees need to understand about the United States, but Robinson said he has found it to be an effective tool for connecting with refugees in the audience on difficult topics.

In-Depth Training: Following initial orientation training, the Boise Police Department conducts in-depth follow-up training on specific topics, often in collaboration with other city agencies. For

60. Dustin Robinson, Boise Police Department, “Refugee Orientation Training,” observed on Mar. 23, 2016.

example, BPD and the Boise Public School System co-host an entire session on presenting positive techniques for child discipline, with police officers and school teachers offering their perspectives.

MANAGING THE DEPARTMENT'S TITLE VI COMPLIANCE

The Refugee Liaison Unit at BPD also maintains the department's compliance with the federal Civil Rights Act's language access requirements.⁶¹ The police department's refugee liaison has a key role on this issue because of the multitude of languages that refugees speak. Robinson is regularly called to the scene for when police officers request interpretation services. Robinson coordinates getting a certified interpreter to the scene, help diffuse any issues that refugees may experience as a result of cultural misunderstandings, and create additional opportunities for face-to-face contacts between police and refugees in the community.

Robinson maintains the Police Department's roster of certified interpreters, coordinating their hiring, assignments, and payment. When BPD first created the Refugee Liaison Unit, it worked with the Boise City Court's Language Access Coordinator to put together a comprehensive list of translators and learn about the applicable standards and training available. The Language Access Coordinator and Robinson collaborate with the refugee resettlement agencies in Boise to learn about new languages coming to the city, so that they have time to hire and train interpreters.

Before adding interpreters to the official roster, BPD conducts a thorough background check and vetting of each candidate. Candidates who pass those tests undergo a certification process that helps individuals who are simply proficient in the language to learn the principles and skills associated with becoming qualified interpreters. One of the major lessons that BPD learned throughout this process was to ensure that interpreters are trained to take confidentiality seriously. Refugee communities in Boise can be small and tight-knit, so confidentiality requirements are essential for protecting refugees' privacy and due process. Refugee interpreters also must master an understanding of rules in the U.S. court system (e.g., prohibitions on *ex parte* communications to parties in cases outside of court that might affect their impartiality), to ensure all procedural requirements are met.

Officer Robinson is responsible for training the rest of the department on Title VI compliance and the department's language access plan. One issue is that using certified interpreters can lengthen the time officers spend responding to a call. In training officers, Robinson acknowledges this challenge and emphasizes why officers should follow proper procedures even if they result in delays. He discusses the department's responsibilities under the Civil Rights Act, how using community members to interpret can potentially taint evidence collection, and how using children to interpret can alter the power dynamics of a family. "We emphasize that while it takes more time to use a certified interpreter, it makes for a better interaction or case," said Robinson. Officers at BPD are instructed to use certified interpreters unless there are exigent circumstances, or the contact with a refugee is a minor, non-criminal matter.

SUPPORTING NEXT GENERATION INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

Boise police also are thinking about creative ways to help support the next generation of refugees. In order for refugees to become fully integrated into the community, BPD officials believe it is essential for them to get involved in local government and public service.

To help support refugees' representation in the public service sector, BPD applied for and was awarded a grant from the federal Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). The grant established a paid internship for a college junior or senior to join the Refugee Liaison Unit in BPD. BPD's first intern, a college student at Boise State University, is a refugee whose family was resettled in Boise. This intern's experiences and cultural knowledge is expected to deepen the police department's engagement with refugee communities. Police officials also hope that the internship program will interest refugee youths in pursuing police careers at BPD.

61. See <https://www.lep.gov/> for more information.

A Summary of the Boise Police Department's Promising Practices for Working with Refugees

- Partnering with resettlement agencies offers opportunities to establish communication, build trust, and educate refugees on the role of local police personnel in the United States.
- Orientation training sessions should provide refugees with basic information on U.S. laws as well as practical tips for living in the United States (e.g., driver's license requirements).
- Advanced training for refugees should cover topics such as domestic violence and child abuse. For these sensitive issues, the Boise Police Department has found it effective to frame the discussion in the context of human rights, emphasizing that all persons have the right to be free from violence.
- Developing a cadre of trained, vetted interpreters to serve in the department not only helps officers to communicate with refugees with limited English proficiency; it also ensures that the department is in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.
- Informal interventions with refugee youths who may be having trouble integrating or experiencing behavioral issues are an effective means to support integration.

Fargo, North Dakota's Cultural Diversity Liaison

Origins of the Fargo Police Department's Programming

The state of North Dakota has been a prominent refugee resettlement area in the United States since the 1940s. It consistently resettles more refugees per capita than many other states, with approximately 71 refugees for every 100,000 residents in fiscal year 2016.⁶² Of those, approximately 70 percent resettle in Fargo.⁶³ Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota is the only refugee resettlement agency in Fargo, responsible for overseeing the successful integration of refugees through case management, education, and employment assistance.

Local government leaders in Fargo view the resettlement of refugees in their city as having a positive impact on their community. "We're reaching out and trying to help our neighbors," said Fargo Mayor Tim Mahoney. "We have jobs, we have needs, and we're trying to grow as a state."⁶⁴

In the early 2000s, the Fargo Police Department (FPD) noticed that, as they experienced a record number of refugees being resettled in the city, that there was a corresponding increase in calls for service based on non-criminal issues (e.g., nuisance complaints). Fargo officers, who were already working with refugees in the community on a regular basis, began exploring proactive strategies for preventing crime and cultural misunderstandings. This was especially pressing, given that many of the refugees moving into Fargo at that time had significant needs for assistance, including many single mothers and community members who were involved in infighting resulting from conflicts in their countries of origin.

In 2002, Fargo funded a position of Refugee Liaison Officer in the Police Department, to proactively address issues with refugees' integration, including conducting education and outreach to engage with the refugee population in Fargo. In 2008, Officer Cristie Jacobsen took the position and was given free rein to shape its priorities and duties. Officer Jacobsen's college education included a minor in cross-cultural communication, and she had experience in the Army, including deployments to Kosovo and Iraq. "I know what it's like to learn a different language, to be in a war, and what PTSD looks like," she said. The position requires a great deal of patience because it involves responding to incidents in the community that require an interpreter, and there are many such incidents every week. The Refugee Liaison Officer needs to be able to dedicate time to studying various cultures in the community.



Officer Cristie Jacobsen visiting a kindergarten class in Fargo (LEFT) and engaging with Somali youth at a community event (ABOVE).

62. Jynnah Radford & Phillip Connor, "Just 10 States Resettled More Than Half of Recent Refugees to U.S.," Pew Research Center (Dec. 6, 2016), available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/12/06/just-10-states-resettled-more-than-half-of-recent-refugees-to-u-s/>.

63. Adrian Glass-Moore, "North Dakota Leads Nation in Refugee Resettlement Per Capita," The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead (Oct. 4, 2015), available at <http://www.inforum.com/news/3853303-north-dakota-leads-nation-refugee-resettlement-capita>.

64. Ibid.

At the same time, FPD renamed the position “Cultural Diversity Liaison.” Jacobsen explained that the change was to signal that the purpose of the position was to help facilitate long-term, comprehensive social integration and cohesion. The word “refugee” is seen as a temporary status designation, and realigning the title to support cultural diversity felt more in line with the overall goal of supporting successful integration of different cultures.

Creation of this position represents an important understanding that multi-cultural outreach is important to the mission of the Fargo Police Department, and that even a medium-sized department with a limited budget can find methods to institutionalize it. “Sometimes, you have to just start out small, even with having an officer who isn’t from a refugee community. Communities recognize acceptance and sincerity when you make an effort,” Officer Jacobsen said.

Jacobsen’s first goal as FPD’s Cultural Diversity Liaison was to build a relationship with the resettlement agency in Fargo, Lutheran Social Services (LSS) (for more information, see “*Building Relationships with Resettlement Agencies*,” page 17). LSS advised Jacobsen about service providers and community organizations that serve refugees in Fargo, so that she could reach out to them as well.

While some groups were initially hesitant to engage with Officer Jacobsen, unsure as to whether her motivation was simply to gain information on criminal activity, they recognized that there was a need to educate refugees in the community about U.S. laws, and saw that Jacobsen could take that role. Over time, Jacobsen built trust with the community organizations by expressing a consistent and earnest interest in engaging with new arrivals in Fargo and supporting their successful integration.

“It’s important to us to be proactive in helping our refugee and new American population. There are unique challenges that they face, but engagement and outreach help us meet those challenges and produce positive relationships that turn into working partnerships. Having the Cultural Diversity Liaison has paid big dividends, both for our communities, our department, and contributing to a better quality of life for everyone.”

**Chief David Todd,
Fargo Police Department**

“What I love about the Cultural Diversity Liaison position is that you are dealing people who have overcome such difficult backgrounds. They are a pleasure to serve and work with, and they are grateful.”

**Officer Cristie Jacobsen,
Fargo Police Department**

After laying this groundwork, Jacobsen was able to cultivate a core group of allies in the community. And by working with Lutheran Social Services and other service-minded organizations, she was able to engage with a large number of refugees. These refugees began introducing her to their religious leaders, talking about the needs in their community, and sharing information about social practices that are legal and considered socially acceptable in their countries of origin, which may differ from American standards.

Importantly, refugees from many different cultures in Fargo were able to connect with Jacobsen. “In an ideal world, you would have representation in the police force from each of the refugee cultures in your city,” said Jacobsen. “But even if that is not possible, communities will recognize sincerity and that you value diversity, even if the police department does not have an officer who comes from their culture.”

Jacobsen estimates that approximately 75 percent of her job is about preventing crime and other problems. Based on her experience, Jacobsen cautions other practitioners to have patience when refugee programming first gets off the ground, because it takes time to build the relationships that are necessary for the program’s success. “This is an atypical law enforcement position, because it is focused on education, outreach, and study,” she said. “There may not be an overwhelming grasp from my fellow officers of what I do on an everyday basis. I hear all the time, ‘I don’t really know what you do, but I’m glad that you do it.’”

This is not to say that the Cultural Diversity Liaison is separate from the rest of the department. The Cultural Diversity Liaison can add tremendous value to other police functions, such as criminal investigations. For example:

1. Crime victims often come directly to the Cultural Diversity Liaison, and the community refers cases to her. In some cases, the Cultural Diversity Liaison happens to know a person who filed a crime report, and can provide information.

2. When there is a higher-level or more extensive crime that requires follow-up investigation, the department may call on the Cultural Diversity Liaison to assist.
3. The Cultural Diversity Liaison may be brought in for cases with there is a need for in-person interpretation (e.g., sexual assault cases), so that she can assist with more thorough follow-up interviews.⁶⁵

The Importance of Culture

Jacobsen noticed that, regardless of refugees' country of origin, they usually face several major barriers to integration, including language barriers and transportation challenges. Jacobsen determined that she could address the transportation issue by relocating her office to the English Language Center, so she is more conveniently located for refugees to meet with her (for more information see "*The Practical Realities of Resettlement*" on page 14). And she addresses the language issue by ensuring that interpreters are present whenever refugees have significant contacts with Fargo police officers. Officers throughout the department also notify the Cultural Diversity Liaison if they respond to a call for service for which follow-up education may be required (e.g., if they respond to a home where they think the situation may escalate to family violence and the family could benefit from more education).

Tailoring Engagement Methods to the Needs of Specific Communities: Through her outreach activities, Jacobsen also became well-versed in the societal structures particular to certain refugee groups. This knowledge helped her to tailor her engagement methods for these communities.

For example, in Jacobsen's experience, members of the Somali refugee community are sometimes wary of engaging with representatives of the American criminal justice system, and may express frustration with the U.S. justice system because it is so different from dispute resolution practices to which they are accustomed. Somalia has not had a functioning government for 25 years, and as a result, the administration of justice is typically handled by clan elders in a system that is exclusively focused on restitution to victims rather than punishment.⁶⁶ Some Somali community members expressed frustration, for instance, when Fargo police arrested a family's primary breadwinner on criminal charges, because doing so had a negative impact on the finances of the whole family.

These issues signaled to Jacobsen that she needed to spend more time explaining the philosophy behind the U.S. justice system to refugees in the community. In communicating with the Somali community in Fargo, Jacobsen also ensured that she recognized and paid respect to community leaders. This demonstrated her respect for and understanding of their cultural practices and, as a result, made the community more receptive to her educational messaging.

Addressing Cultural Practices That Conflict with U.S. Laws: Jacobsen found that it was also important to understand and explicitly address cultural values that conflict with U.S. laws. This was the case with newly-arrived Bhutanese refugees in Fargo, who were coming from a culture that still recognizes a caste system. Jacobsen, in conjunction with her resettlement agency partners, talked to Bhutanese refugees about how that system no longer applies in the United States. While encouraging integration into U.S. society, Jacobsen noted, police should be aware of how that deeply embedded cultural dynamic can affect refugees interacting with each other in the public school system or housing complexes.

Identifying and Working with "True" Leaders in the Community: In some communities, the higher leadership is cultural, while in others, it is religious. For example, the Liberian community has a formally elected group, including a President, Board, and Treasurer, Jacobsen said. For this community, Jacobsen worked with the official structure and also found persons who had unofficial trust in the community.

In some instances, it may not be easy to tell who has the ability to influence or speak for a community. "For refugees I met, I would ask them who they recognize as a leader, who is it they turn to for

65. Cristie Jacobsen, personal interview, Nov. 1, 2016.

66. See Louisa Lombard, How Somalia's Aged Tribal Justice System Keeps the Peace in Country Known for Chaos, *Legal Affairs* (Sept./Oct. 2005), available at http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/September-October-2005/scene_lombard_sepoct05.msp.

cultural support and resources,” said Jacobsen. At the same time, while identifying leaders in the community can make things easier, engagement should not be limited to them. “I offered to work with any and every one who is interested in working with the police department,” said Jacobsen.

Training and Preventative Education

Like many other agencies, the Fargo Police Department also conducts educational training for refugees as a mechanism for establishing trust and preventing cultural misunderstandings and unintentional violations of the law. Fargo’s Cultural Diversity Liaison conducts the training. Topics include the role of the police in the United States, domestic violence, and child abuse.

Officer Jacobsen noted that it is important to begin every training with a purposeful statement designed to make refugees feel welcome and to ease their fears. “I welcome them to the U.S., recognizing that they have value here and that interacting with police is a scary thing for them,” said Jacobsen.

In her training, Jacobsen is careful not to say that the approach to criminal justice in the United States is the “correct” or “better” way. Rather, it is simply the system under which we operate. By emphasizing this point, Jacobsen makes it clear to the refugees that her instruction is intended to be clarifying, not accusatory. Jacobsen underscores that refugees have the same rights as any U.S. citizen (including rights to safety, their express opinions, to practice their faith, and to raise families). She also frames the conversation positively, ensuring that discussions about the law are not simply a list of prohibited conduct. “I tell them, this is who I am, and it’s my job to study your culture and learn about it,” says Jacobsen. “I know that you would never reach out to police in your home country, but I hope that over time you will see that the Fargo Police Department is different.”

In Fargo, if refugees are accustomed to a cultural or societal practice that does not have safety implications, the police may adjust their operations to accommodate it (for example, in some cultures, it is considered improper for male officers to be alone with women). In instances in which accommodating a cultural practice is not practical or safe, however, educating refugees about why those accommodations cannot be made is crucial to ensuring that refugees do not lose faith in the Department as a result of a foreseeable misunderstanding. “For example, in some cultures it is considered disrespectful not to remove one’s shoes, but that is a safety issue for first responders,” said Jacobsen.

Importantly, Jacobsen also teaches refugees about the difference between the U.S. justice system and the court systems in their countries of origin. The Fargo Police Department realized that sometimes crime victims in the community did not understand the fundamentals of the criminal justice system in the United States, which in turn was negatively impacting their perceptions of the police.

Some key gaps in understanding were that individuals accused of crimes are considered innocent until proven guilty, that they can often post bond to obtain pretrial release from jail, and that their court cases may take many months to resolve. As a result of this knowledge gap, Jacobsen said, “Victims felt that we did not care about their case or their safety.” In the department’s educational programming about the justice system, FPD makes it clear that though there are aspects of the U.S. justice system that are unfamiliar to refugees, that does not mean that a case is forgotten. Taking the time to address these misunderstandings helps the department establish trust with the community.

FPD also translates its educational efforts into action that can help the community. In cooperation with the public school system, for instance, the Cultural Diversity Liaison provides education about family dynamics. The Liaison can also talk to school personnel about behavioral issues with students who may need a home visit. Educational efforts about domestic violence can also have a positive impact on the community. As part of outreach programming, the Cultural Diversity Liaison provides a wide range of information, for example, guidance on what a no-contact order means, how to fill out housing applications, medical care issues, and social services for crime victims.

A Summary of the Fargo Police Department's Promising Practices for Working with Refugees and Cultural Diversity

- Proactive outreach and engagement programs signal to the refugee community that the department respects diversity and is sincere in its effort to build relationships of trust with them.
- Departments must recognize that building relationships takes time and commitment. It requires continued effort and does not happen overnight.
- Police should tailor engagement efforts and activities to the particular culture or specific needs of the different refugee groups within their community.
- Educational efforts should focus on explaining local laws to prevent cultural misunderstandings that lead to unintentional violations of the laws.
- While delivering education, departments should empower refugees by giving them a wide range of tools for positive behavior, not simply telling them what behavior is prohibited in the United States. For example, rather than simply discussing child abuse laws, also present a range of potential child discipline techniques.
- Where possible, police should adjust their operations or interactions with refugees to account for different cultural or societal practices, such as trying to find a female officer to speak with refugees whose culture prohibits women from being alone with men.

Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Refugee-Specific Programming within the Office of Community Engagement (OCE)

In 2016, Las Vegas welcomed 3,024 refugees fleeing persecution. Approximately 70 percent of refugees resettled in Las Vegas are from Cuba. Other countries of origin include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Eritrea, and Iraq.⁶⁷ There are several organizations in the Las Vegas metropolitan area that assist refugees, including Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada and the East African Community Center.

In 2011, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's (LVMPD) expanded its community outreach program—operated by its Office of Community Engagement (OCE)⁶⁸—to include programming geared towards refugee integration. “Refugees are coming from countries with such stark differences to the United States and with such high needs, that we recognized the necessity of developing specific programming for them,” said Lieutenant Sasha Larkin of LVMPD.

Larkin leads the OCE, supervising its staff of 17, comprising 13 police officers, two sergeants, one firefighter, and one civilian coordinator. Each OCE staff member specializes in engaging with a particular segment or segments of the community, including the faith community, women, the private sector, other government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. “Once we started increasing connectivity with Catholic Charities and the East African Community Center, our refugee outreach just starting forming organically,” Larkin recalled. In 2016, she assigned two full-time police officers to refugee outreach and engagement exclusively.

Outreach to Religious Institutions and Home Visits

LVMPD's two dedicated refugee outreach officers specialize in specific components of refugee outreach, splitting their duties to maximize their impact. One officer, for instance, works on outreach to religious institutions and makes home visits to assist refugees. She is tasked with conducting outreach to every house of worship in the community. “All of the religious leaders in the community—whether Priests, Pastors, Imams, or Rabbis—know her and now have a key contact in the department to whom they can turn,” said Lieutenant Larkin.

As a part of their holistic philosophy, LVMPD has also mobilized and empowered a group of these faith leaders to assist the Department with public safety issues. For example, the department now organizes a program called RECAP (Rebuilding Every City Around Peace). RECAP mobilizes a group of volunteer faith leaders to reach out to communities following acts of violence (e.g., a gang shooting) with the aim of decreasing fear in the neighborhood and encouraging healing to prevent retaliatory violence.

LVMPD also implemented a home visit program for refugees resettling in the Las Vegas area. Lieutenant Larkin explained that the need for the home visits became particularly clear after several Syrian refugee families resettled in the city. “The Syrian refugees who came here were in such dire straits and needed more hands-on assistance in order to make it,” said Larkin. The refugee outreach officer visits newly-arrived refugees in their homes to provide them with help in meeting their basic needs. This might include providing refugees with a ride to houses of worship (connecting them to a congregation who can help them in the process), helping them look for work, and providing friendship. The home visits are intended to decrease

“For all of the sworn officers in this room, regardless of your rank, understand that this is a humanistic approach to law enforcement. And integrating refugees is relatively new to us, so don't be afraid to make mistakes. Understand where the refugees may end up in your city in those wraparound services that they need.”

Sergeant Ivan Chatman, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department

67. Sandy Lopez, Las Vegas Agencies Help Refugees Transition to American Life, The Las Vegas Review Journal (May 19, 2016), available at <http://www.reviewjournal.com/view/centennial/las-vegas-agencies-help-refugees-transition-american-life>.

68. While LVMPD's outreach efforts began in 2009 as a Fusion Liaison Officer Program, operated through the Southern Nevada Counter Terrorism Center, they have since been moved into the OCE, which is organized under the Law Enforcement Operations Group. The Operations Group also include the Community Policing Division and the Tourist Safety Division.

over time, providing structured support until refugees feel that they can provide for themselves and need less help with their process of integration.

One important caveat is that the home visits are only undertaken on a voluntary basis. “We only want to show up at a refugees’ house if they want us there, but we have found that they are grateful for assistance,” said Larkin. “The entire purpose is to give them some support and let them know the police are their friends.”

LVMPD’s “First Touch” Training for Refugees

LVMPD’s other dedicated refugee outreach officer is Sergeant Ivan Chatman, who focuses exclusively on training and educational opportunities for refugees. In 2016, Chatman was tasked with expanding LVMPD’s “First Touch” Training for Refugees, which is the educational programming that LVMPD delivers to refugees as part of their cultural orientation training when they first arrive in Las Vegas. Chatman delivers “First Touch” training in the offices of local service providers dedicated to refugee resettlement, mainly Catholic Charities and the East African Community Center.

The two-hour training segment is broken into halves. The first hour is dedicated to building trust, and the second hour covers substantive legal issues of which refugees should be aware.

The training begins with welcoming refugees and familiarizing them with the police. “Refugees may be so fearful of us, at first, so we want to create the initial trust where they feel comfortable shaking our hand or looking us in the eye,” said Chatman. To break the ice, Chatman brings OCE’s fire department representative to training. “Everyone loves a firefighter, and we’ve found it helpful in bridge the gap of fear that refugees may have,” said Lieutenant Sasha Larkin of the tactic.

To overcome language barriers, LVMPD ensures that its “First Touch” training is very visual, and relies largely on images rather than blocks of text. For example, to improve refugees’ awareness of the various public safety agencies in the region, LVMPD includes pictures of each agency’s marked police vehicle, uniform, and badge. Because Las Vegas Fire & Rescue is also involved, the “First Touch” training covers basic fire safety tips as well.

The training also covers more in-depth topics. The segment on driving laws, for instance, includes instruction about the process for obtaining a drivers’ license, proper documents required for vehicle ownership and driving, and potential fines if a driver does not have them. “Refugees are incredibly grateful for this information, because no one else will tell them about it, and it can potentially save them substantial amount of money that they may not have,” Lieutenant Larkin said.

One important lesson LVMPD learned when creating its “First Touch” training was to let the curriculum be flexible enough to address refugees’ questions, and using those questions to determine discussion topics. For example, below are several questions refugees have asked LVMPD staff that in turn helped shape the “First Touch” training:

- “Does the police department also represent other departments, likes immigration, the DMV, public transportation, utilities, etc.?”
- “Where can I find a list of rules of conduct for Las Vegas?”
- “We see non-police officers wearing a gun in public areas. Is this legal?”
- “What is jaywalking? Will I receive a ticket for doing it? And how much would it be?”
- “Do I always need a driver’s license?”



The Office of Community Engagement’s staff conducting a training for refugees in Las Vegas.

- “What if someone comes to my door and they are wearing a LVMP uniform and they say to open the door? What should I do? Is this person a real LVMP officer?”⁶⁹

Because of questions like these, LVMPD trainers have expanded the topics covered during “First Touch” training. These new topics include: the Second Amendment and gun safety (for more information, see “*Education: An Emphasis on Preventing Crime and Misunderstanding*” on page 21); distinguishing between various uniforms; and driving regulations.

Beyond providing refugees with critical practical knowledge about their new home, these classes also give LVMPD the opportunity to engage with refugees in a positive way and begin to build relationships of trust with them. “This relationship-building does not require anything fancy or expensive. It is more about having an officer who cares and who can demonstrate their passion,” said Lieutenant Larkin.

Cultural Competency Training for First Responders: OCE also provides cultural competency training to LVMPD officers in the Academy and with in-service training. The outreach team developed this training in partnership with local community leaders, and brings these leaders into the department to assist in delivering it. This means that it is tailored to the Las Vegas community specifically, that it is accurate, and that the community feels invested in the training and in its success in the department. OCE is now bringing cultural competency training to the Fire Department as well.

Specialized Outreach for Women and Youth

The OCE also pays particular attention to reaching out to particular groups in the community who may need individualized programming. To that end, OCE has undertaken special initiatives to build relationships with women and youth.

The OCE established a “Female Engagement Team,” or FET, to lead its outreach to women in the community. The FET is staffed by women and is responsible for engaging with women in Las Vegas who, due to cultural mores or other reasons, may not feel comfortable socializing with men or building relationships with male officers in the OCE. “It is important to ensure that women of all cultures can cultivate a community here in Las Vegas,” Lieutenant Larkin said.

FET provides a space where women can make connections with each other. Some examples include the following:

- The group has hosted beauty days at a local salon, which volunteered its space to provide beauty services that take clients’ culture and limited means into account.
- FET holds a monthly “meet and greet” at mosques in the Las Vegas area to allow women of the Muslim faith to interact with one another.
- FET provides opportunities for women in the community to participate in each other’s traditions, for example hosting gatherings during important holidays.

FET’s community-building activities provide an effective mechanism to deliver needed services while promoting social cohesion. One of the FET’s most successful initiatives is its annual Women’s Health Fair (WHF). At the WHF, culturally competent women doctors from each of the eight largest faith communities in the Las Vegas area gather in one location to provide health care services and examinations for women in the community. The program recently received a grant to operate a mobile health trailer that can bring health care providers to women in the community who may not be able to go to them.

OCE’s refugee programming also includes special initiatives to reach out to young people in the community. This includes reaching out to young people using the new media with which they are often most comfortable. “When we go to events—even if just with community elders—we take video to post it on social media, to ensure that we are also reaching young people,” Lieutenant Larkin said.

OCE’s newest push is to connect with refugee youths through the school system. OCE has discovered that its Police Athletic League (PAL) program has proven effective in engaging refugee youths. “We

69. Ivan Chatman, personal interview, Mar. 21, 2017.



ABOVE, LEFT: Refugee youth posing in a Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department cruiser.

ABOVE: Las Vegas Metropolitan police instructing a yoga class at the Clark County Detention Center.

FAR LEFT: Office of Community Engagement staff attending an event with Ethiopian community members, including Girma Zaid, Board member of the East African Community Center.

LEFT: Officers letting refugee youth try on a police vest.

were working with the refugee communities within schools to figure out what sports connect kids back to their homeland, and remind them that they still have a connection to their culture,” said Lieutenant Larkin. PAL events and leagues provide opportunities for refugee youths to connect with other kids at their schools and in their larger communities, so that they do not feel socially isolated. LVMPD has also reported success using PAL to engage with refugee children because they can then become ambassadors to the rest of their families as well. “It’s amazing to see parents attending our athletic events interact with each other and form a larger societal connection,” said Larkin.

Through the process, LVMPD has learned that it can use its pre-existing community engagement programs to engage with refugees to great effect. For example, the Department is now conducting a quantitative survey to determine if any refugees are recipients of its new correctional programming in the jails (including classes on parenting, positive interactions with the police, nutrition, and yoga). “The goal is to ensure we are not falling short on refugees,” Lieutenant Larkin said. “We want to make sure we are not incarcerating them for offenses they may commit to ensure their survival, which could be addressed with wrap-around services.”

Promising Practices for Refugee Engagement from the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Office of Community Engagement

- Engagement should be multi-pronged, emphasizing education, outreach to cultural and religious institutions, and voluntary home visits where officers stop by the homes of refugees who have given permission for officers to check in on them and offer assistance.
- Tailor initial training for refugees based on the questions that refugees have asked in prior sessions. Try to incorporate other city services (such as the fire department) to make refugees aware of a comprehensive range of public safety issues.
- Create specialized engagement efforts for refugees with unique needs. For instance, consider implementing tailored initiatives for female refugees that respect cultural mores and help deliver services. The Female Engagement Team's organization of a World Health Fair that provides culturally-sensitive medical services to female refugees is a good example.
- Programs for refugee youth such as athletic leagues and social media outreach are also effective in supporting the community.

Conclusion: Promising Practices for Building Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs

The world is in the midst of a global refugee crisis of historic proportions. The number of individuals seeking refuge outside of their home countries is surpassing even the large numbers who migrated in the wake of the Second World War.

The current administration is seeking to restrict the numbers of refugees entering the United States, both in terms of the annual acceptance cap and through executive action.

In the middle of this increasingly polarized environment, state and local police leaders have carved out a significant role. Police executives see their role as providing public safety, a goal that is advanced when police agencies build relationships of trust with all of the communities in their jurisdiction, including refugee communities. Many state and local police agencies have recognized that creating or enhancing refugee-specific police programming is essential for supporting overall integration of refugees into American society. While refugee-specific police programming is not new, the desire for police to expand these programs and share promising practices across jurisdictions has substantially increased in the last year.

Police should recognize the unique challenges they face in building relationships of trust with refugees, but also understand that these challenges can be overcome. Refugees often come from countries where police officers were agents of the repressive regime they fled, and so many refugees associate police agencies with human rights abuses. Many refugees also come into the United States with significant needs, including a lack of formal education and the means to achieve self-sufficiency in the United States, which pose unique challenges for police engagement. Refugees may also have experienced trauma that can shape their interactions with police. While these circumstances make engagement more difficult and require police to learn about refugee experiences, the experiences of police departments across the country demonstrate that proactive officers can bridge these gaps.

A national conference that PERF held in September 2016 brought together police leaders from across the country to share promising practices for engaging with refugees. Police spoke about the importance of working collaboratively with resettlement agencies and community leaders to connect refugees to services and help them feel welcome. Police shared ideas for building comprehensive educational efforts to help refugees understand U.S. laws and norms, in order to decrease cultural misunderstandings and potential criminal activity. Police leaders also spoke about their efforts to ensure they are well-positioned

to support refugees, including efforts to improve interactions with individuals with limited English proficiency; cultural competency training for their officers; and efforts to empower refugees to become a part of local communities, and even to join their police forces.

This report highlights several case studies of police programs from cities throughout the country that have engaged in refugee-specific outreach for several years. Police agencies throughout the country can learn from these cities' experiences in shaping their own engagement initiatives. The following is a summary of promising practices for police engagement and outreach to refugee communities. These can help guide agencies that are interested in implementing their own programs and initiatives. This work is crucial for safe and socially cohesive communities, particularly in the midst of a tense political environment.

Understanding How the Refugee Experience May Affect Police Work:

1. Police officers should understand that many refugees come from home countries where the police acted as agents of an oppressive regime, which contributes to a sense of distrust and fear.
2. In order to craft successful engagement with refugees, police should be aware of how trauma and fear may impact their interactions. For example, trauma can impact refugees' memory and potentially trigger a "fight or flight" response when they are approached by an officer. Awareness by the police can help reduce misunderstanding and break down barriers.
3. Practical concerns about housing, education, and economic self-sufficiency often are at the forefront of refugees' minds when they first resettle to the United States. Police departments should take care to structure engagement in a way that accounts for those practical concerns, such as holding training sessions at resettlement offices or English language learning centers.
4. In some communities, unscrupulous actors target refugees specifically because of their unfamiliarity with U.S. laws and reluctance to report crime to police. Police departments must remain committed to providing consistent engagement to build trust with crime victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process.
5. Police officers working with refugees should understand how calls for service regarding refugees may be the result of cultural misunderstanding and lack of experience with U.S. laws, customs, and social norms. Officers should use these encounters as an opportunity to help educate refugees about the U.S. justice system.

Laying the Groundwork for a Refugee Engagement Program:

6. Agencies specializing in refugee resettlement can provide a wealth of knowledge to police agencies about refugees and their experiences and cultures. Police officers looking to build a successful refugee engagement program should, therefore, build a positive working relationship with resettlement agencies, as a critical first step toward building trust.
7. To achieve comprehensive engagement, police officers should also work with community leaders from civic, cultural, and religious organizations. Working with trusted leaders in the community—particularly when a specific group is hesitant to engage with police—is crucial to building trust.

Engagement Strategies for Building Relationships with Refugees:

8. In several jurisdictions across the United States, police agencies that participate in programs to welcome refugees when they first arrive have reported success in demonstrating their commitment to refugees in their community.

9. Police departments have also reported success in building trust with refugees by serving as the entry point to connect them with service providers working in the community. Police also can build relationships with refugees by participating in existing programs offered by service providers, or by organizing their own community service efforts to help refugees.
10. Police departments should try creative means to increase interpersonal interactions between refugees and officers. Programs that police agencies have deployed include bike and foot patrols geared toward community engagement and recreational athletic leagues.
11. Police agencies have also formed a variety of formal structures to solidify their community engagement with refugees. Some examples of formal community engagement are Advisory Boards, specialized Citizens' Academies, and youth programs.

Education: An Emphasis on Preventing Crime and Misunderstanding:

12. In order to support positive refugee integration, police agencies must be committed to helping educate refugees about the U.S. justice system and helping to prevent them from inadvertently engaging in illegal behavior because of cultural differences. Police agencies should implement initial training for refugees who resettle in the United States (particularly during their mandated orientation) to explain U.S. laws and how the police and other elements of the justice system operate. Training topics that are useful for refugee integration include: the role of police in the United States; how to report crime (including use of 911); how to interact with police; basic rules and information about transportation systems; and prohibitions against domestic violence and child abuse.
13. Agencies should also engage in follow-up educational programs for refugees: 1) to reinforce initial training, 2) to cover specific topics in-depth, and 3) to discuss issues that affect refugees who have lived in the United States for a significant period of time.

Cultural Competency and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Training for the Entire Department:

14. Police agencies with a large population of refugees should be mindful of interactions with refugees not only through dedicated outreach personnel, but as importantly, with all officers in their department. Cultural competency training for the entire department is essential for police officers to give them tools to effectively interact with refugees in a range of different situations.
15. Agencies should also ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and provide officers with the tools they need to successfully interact with individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). This should include guidance on when to use an interpreter and tips for effectively interacting with LEP individuals through an interpreter.

Next Generation Issues:

16. Police departments should be aware that after refugees have been living in the United States for a significant period of time, additional issues may arise. For example, finding ways to empower parents to employ successful, positive child discipline techniques can help support successful refugee integration for entire families.
17. Police departments also may consider participating in informal youth interventions for refugee children who may be experiencing difficulty integrating or who may be exhibiting behavioral issues. Interventions staged early on when children experience issues can help prevent youth from engaging in criminal activity.

18. To truly help refugees become a part of the fabric of a community, police departments should also help empower them to become public servants and participate in local government. Police agencies should strive to recruit and hire refugee officers.
19. To sustain relationships of trust with members of refugee communities, police departments must proactively mitigate hate crimes by correcting misinformation and educating the entire community on the benefits of social cohesiveness.

As the most visible representatives of government—on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year—police officers are in a unique position to conduct outreach and build bonds of trust with the community. With refugees, many of whom may distrust the police in their home countries and may not understand the dynamics of the U.S. justice system, the police face considerable challenges and opportunities for building relationships of trust. When outreach and engagement with refugee communities are conducted in a planned, proactive and comprehensive manner, the entire community is safer.

About PERF

The **Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)** is an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force, developing community policing and problem-oriented policing, using technologies to deliver police services to the community, and evaluating crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership, public debate of police and criminal justice issues, and research and policy development.

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies, educates hundreds of police officials each year in a three-week executive development program, and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

PERF is governed by a member-elected president and board of directors and a board-appointed executive director. A staff of approximately 30 full-time professionals is based in Washington, D.C.

To learn more, visit PERF online at www.policeforum.org.

About Carnegie Corporation of New York

Carnegie Corporation of New York was established in 1911 by Andrew Carnegie to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding. In keeping with this mandate, the Corporation's work focuses on the issues that Andrew Carnegie considered of paramount importance: international peace, the advancement of education and knowledge, and the strength of our democracy.

To learn more about Carnegie Corporation of New York, visit www.carnegie.org.



Appendix A: The UNCHR's Six Categories of Resettlement

Refugees must meet the requirements under one or more of these categories in order to be considered for resettlement:

- **Legal and/or physical protection needs:**
 - “Immediate or long-term threat of *refoulement* to the country of origin or expulsion to another country from where the refugee may be *refouled*;
 - Threat of arbitrary arrest, detention or imprisonment;
 - Threat to physical safety or fundamental human rights in the country of refuge, rendering asylum untenable.”⁷⁰
- **Survivors of violence and/or torture:**
 - “Has experienced torture and/or violence either in the country of origin or the country of asylum; *and*
 - May have lingering physical or psychological effects from the torture or violence, although there may be no apparent physical signs or symptoms; *and*
 - Could face further traumatization and/or heightened risk due to the conditions of asylum and or repatriation; *and*
 - May require medical or psychological care, support or counseling not available in the country of asylum; *and*
 - Requires resettlement to meet their specific needs.”⁷¹
- **Medical needs:**
 - “Diagnosis: Life threatening, or irreversible loss of functions, or obstacle to normal life; *and*
 - Treatment: Not available or accessible in country of asylum and medical evacuation not feasible; *and*

70. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/resettlement/3d464e842/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-chapter-6-unhcr-resettlement-submission-categories.html>, 248.

71. *Ibid*, 251.

- Prognosis: Favorable prognosis for cure in resettlement country, or the stay in first asylum causes or worsens health condition; *and*
- Informed Consent: Resettlement is the expressed wish of the individual.”⁷²
- **Women and girls at risk:**
 - “She faces a precarious security or physical protection threat because of her gender;
 - She has specific needs arising from past persecution and/or traumatization;
 - She faces severe hardship resulting in exposure to exploitation and abuse, rendering asylum untenable;
 - There has been a change in the social norms, customs, laws and values resulting in the suspension of or deviation from traditional protection and conflict resolution mechanisms and the lack of alternative systems of support and protection. This places the refugee woman or girl at such risk that it renders asylum untenable.”⁷³
- **Family reunification:**
 - “At least one person within the family to be reunited is a refugee under the UNHCR mandate or a person of concern to UNHCR; and
 - The individuals to be reunited are family members under UNHCR’s inclusive definition; and
 - The individuals are reuniting with a member of the family already in a resettlement country; and
 - The availability and accessibility of other family reunification or migration options has been reviewed and the submission of a resettlement case has been determined to be the most appropriate option given the resettlement needs and protection implications for the family member.”⁷⁴
- **Children and adolescents at risk:**
 - “Is under 18;
 - May or may not be an unaccompanied or separated child;
 - Has compelling protection needs which are not addressed in the country of asylum and resettlement has been determined to be the most appropriate solution.”⁷⁵
- **Lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions:**
 - “Refugees have an on-going, not an urgent, need for resettlement;
 - Most commonly used for group resettlement, but also applicable to individuals;
 - Particularly useful in addressing protracted refugee situations;
 - Applied in coordination with national or regional strategies to address the needs of specific refugee groups.”⁷⁶

*Within these categories, refugees’ resettlement priority levels are classified as:*⁷⁷

- **Emergency** – The refugee needs to be resettled within seven days for security or medical reasons.
- **Urgent** – The refugee needs to be resettled within six weeks for medical or other reasons.
- **Normal** – The refugee does not require expedited resettlement.

72. <http://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>.

73. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/resettlement/3d464e842/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-chapter-6-unhcr-resettlement-submission-categories.html>, 265.

74. *Ibid*, 271.

75. *Ibid*, 285.

76. <http://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>.

77. <http://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>.

Appendix B: Understanding the Resettlement Process: How the United States Has Historically Admitted Refugees

NOTE: This is a description of the process for admitting refugees to the United States prior to the election of President Trump, who has indicated a desire to change the admittance and vetting process. For refugees already living in the United States, this appendix details the process by which they were relocated to the United States.

As a function of its mandate to provide international protection to refugees, the UNHCR is also charged with seeking “durable solutions”—or long-term resettlement options—for refugees.⁷⁸ There are three internationally accepted durable solutions:

- **Voluntary repatriation.** This means that refugees decide to return to their countries of origin. Provided that it is safe and that these refugees are able to re-avail themselves of the protection of the government in their country of origin, this is the preferred durable solution.
- **Local integration** into refugees’ country of initial asylum, i.e., the country to which they first fled. This means that refugees legally, socially, and economically become part of the host country and receive the full national protection of its government.
- **Resettlement in a third country.** When neither voluntary repatriation nor local integration in their country of first asylum is deemed feasible or safe, refugees are considered for resettlement in a different country.

Fewer than one percent of refugees worldwide are resettled in a third country.⁷⁹ The vast majority either voluntarily return to their countries of origin or are integrated into their country of first asylum.

The United States is one of the few U.N. countries that resettle refugees, and historically it has been “the world’s top resettlement country,” according to UNHCR.⁸⁰ The President of the United

78. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*, (2011), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=46f7c0ee2&query=resettlement%20handbook>.

79. U.S. Department of State, “Refugee Admissions,” available at <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/>.

80. See UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “Resettlement,” at: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html>.

States determines each year how many refugees the United States will accept. According to the Pew Research Center, the United States admitted an average of 112,000 refugees every year between 1990 and 1995, and 84,995 in the 2016 fiscal year.⁸¹

Refugee Status vs. Asylum Status in the United States

Under U.S. law, people fleeing their home countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution can apply for either **refugee or asylum status** in the United States, depending on their circumstances.

According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), in order to be admitted to the United States as a **refugee**, an applicant must be:⁸²

- Located **outside** the United States;
- Of special humanitarian concern to the United States;
- Able to demonstrate that they were persecuted or that they fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (i.e., able to meet the legal definition of a refugee);
- *Not* firmly resettled in another country; and
- Admissible to the United States.

The USCIS also makes clear that “a refugee does **not** include anyone who ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁸³

According to the USCIS, people can apply for **asylum** in the United States if they:⁸⁴

- Meet the legal definition of a refugee;
- Are already in the United States;
- Are seeking admission to the United States at a port of entry.

(These definitions of “refugee” and “asylum” in U.S. law differ somewhat from general usage in the field of international refugee protection. Internationally, the term “**asylum-seeker**” is generally used to mean “someone whose request for sanctuary [and official recognition as a refugee] has yet to be processed.”⁸⁵

STEP 1: Determining Who Is Eligible for Potential Resettlement

Once the UNHCR determines that an applicant meets the definition of a refugee, it uses six categories to ascertain whether that person⁸⁶ is eligible for third country resettlement.⁸⁷ Resettlement, according to the UNHCR, “involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought

81. Jens Manuel Krogstad & Jynnah Radford, *Key Facts About Refugees to the U.S.* (Jan. 30, 2017). Pew Research Center. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/30/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>.

82. See U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Refugees” at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees>.

83. *Ibid.*

84. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Refugees & Asylum” at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum>.

85. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “Asylum-Seekers” at <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/asylum-seekers.html>.

86. According to the UNHCR, even if someone is not determined to be a refugee consistent with the definition described by the 1951 Convention, “exceptions can be made for non-refugee stateless persons for whom resettlement is considered the most appropriate durable solution, and also for the resettlement of non-refugee dependent family members to retain family unity.” For more information, see UNCHR, “UNHCR Resettlement Submission Categories,” available at <http://www.unhcr.org/558bff849.pdf>.

87. Though the UNHCR is typically the agency that refers refugee applicants to third country governments for resettlement, sometimes U.S. Embassies or specially trained nongovernmental organizations will do so as well. Of the refugees who have been resettled in the United States, approximately 75 were submitted for resettlement by the UNHCR. For more, see Justin Fisk, *The Current State*, “E-Newsletter: States’ Role in Refugee Resettlement” (Jan/Feb. 2017), available at http://www.csg.org/pubs/capitolideas/enevs/cs41_2.aspx.

protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them—as refugees—with permanent residence status.”⁸⁸ In order to determine whether or not applicants qualify under one or more of these categories, the UNHCR:

- Reviews their identifying documents;
- Collects their biographical information;
- Takes their biometric data (such as iris scans taken from Syrian applicants, for instance); and
- Interviews the applicants.⁸⁹

If the UNHCR determines that an asylum-seeker meets the definition of a refugee and is eligible for resettlement in a third country, it submits the applicant’s case to a resettlement country for consideration.⁹⁰

STEP 2: Referral to a United States Resettlement Support Center (RSC)

When the UNHCR submits an applicant’s case to the United States for consideration, it does so through the United States Refugee Admission Program (USRAP). Applications are first processed by a United States-funded **Resettlement Support Center (RSC)** located overseas.⁹¹ There are nine RSCs, all of which are managed by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugee, and Migration (PRM).⁹²

RSC staff prepare a file on the applicant, which includes the applicant’s identification and biographical information, in preparation for a complete security screening by U.S. security agencies.⁹³

STEP 3: Biographic Security Checks Begin

Using the information provided by the RSC, U.S. security agencies conduct their first screening of the applicant. As part of this first screening, the State Department runs the applicant’s name through a Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) check.⁹⁴ According to USCIS, CLASS includes information from:⁹⁵

- The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)
- Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)
- Department of State

88. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*, (2011), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=46f7c0ee2&query=resettlement%20handbook>.

89. The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. “Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States,” available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/57a24d23893fc0eb3919ad0f/1470254386734/USCRI+Security+Screening+Process+%285.16.16%29.pdf>.

90. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*, (2011), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=46f7c0ee2&query=resettlement%20handbook>.

91. Some refugees, depending on certain criteria, can apply directly to the USRAP without receiving a referral from the UNHCR or another agency.

92. U.S. Department of State. “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program,” at <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/index.htm>.

93. The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. “Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States,” available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/57a24d23893fc0eb3919ad0f/1470254386734/USCRI+Security+Screening+Process+%285.16.16%29.pdf>.

94. Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees. “About US Refugees Admissions Program (USRAP),” at <http://dhr.maryland.gov/maryland-office-for-refugees-and-asylees/us-refugees-admissions-program-usrap/>.

95. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Refugee Processing and Security Screening,” at <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening#Enhanced%20Review>.

NCTC also “conducts an Inter-Agency Check (IAC) on applicants within a designated age range.”⁹⁶ This is a “recurrent vetting process,” meaning that if any new, problematic information is discovered after the first IAC is run and before the applicant arrives in the United States, USCIS will be notified.⁹⁷

Applications from Syrian nationals received an extra layer of review from DHS in addition to what is typically conducted for refugee status applicants.⁹⁸ This special process is called “Syria Enhanced Review.”⁹⁹ “Refugees,” the White House under the Obama Administration said, “are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States.”¹⁰⁰

STEP 4: Department of Homeland Security Interview

Next, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officers review the results of the security screening and conduct a detailed, in-person interview of the applicant as well as any accompanying family members who are over the age of 14.¹⁰¹ The purpose of this interview is to assess the applicant’s truthfulness and credibility, determine if the applicant qualifies for resettlement, and identify any potential legal barriers to admission.¹⁰²

The USCIS officers who conduct these interviews are highly trained on subjects such as refugee law, fraud detection, credibility analysis, and the conditions in the countries from which applicants have fled.¹⁰³ According to USCIS, “Before deploying overseas, officers also receive additional training on the specific population that they will be interviewing, detailed country of origin information, and updates on any fraud trends or security issues that have been identified.”¹⁰⁴ USCIS officers tasked with interviewing Syrian applicants receive still more specialized training on country-specific information and interview techniques.¹⁰⁵

Once the interview process is complete, DHS decides whether or not to send the application to the next step.

STEP 5: Biometric Security Checks

The applicant’s fingerprints are collected and compared against:

- The FBI’s biometric database;
- The DHS biometric database; and
- The U.S. Department of Defense database.¹⁰⁶

96. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, “Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States: A Detailed, Rigorous Process,” available at <http://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Security-Check-Steps.pdf>.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, “Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States” available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/57a24d23893fc0eb3919ad0f/1470254386734/USCRI+Security+Screening+Process+%285.16.16%29.pdf>.

100. Amy Pope, the White House, “Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States,” (Nov. 20, 2015), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>.

101. Refugee Council USA. “The Rigorous Process of Screening Refugees for Resettlement to the United States,” (Jan. 2017), available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/588108379f74567afd5b2f9f/1484851255926/RCUSA+Refugee+Security+Screening+Backgrounder+-+January+2017.pdf>.

102. Ibid.

103. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Refugee Processing and Security Screening,” at <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening#Enhanced%20Review>.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

DHS reviews the results of the fingerprint screen. If DHS staff members identify any security issues, they deny the resettlement application.¹⁰⁷

STEP 6: Medical Check

Designated medical personnel screen the applicant to ensure that the applicant does not have any diseases that pose a threat to public health.¹⁰⁸

STEP 7: Cultural Orientation and Assignment to Domestic Resettlement Locations

Applicants are then matched with a resettlement agency contracted by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and they receive cultural orientation classes to prepare them for life in the United States.¹⁰⁹ At this stage, representatives from the nine U.S.-based resettlement agencies also assess the applicant to determine where to resettle each refugee in the United States.¹¹⁰ They consider factors such as the location of any family members who already live in the United States, or health issues that might make some locations a better fit for the applicant than others.¹¹¹

According to a summary of the process released during the Obama Administration, "Throughout this process, pending applications continue to be checked against terrorist databases, to ensure new, relevant terrorism information has not come to light. If a match is found, that case is paused for further review. If there is doubt about whether an applicant poses a security risk, they will not be admitted."¹¹²

STEP 8: Travel to and Arrival in the United States

Once a resettlement location has been chosen and the applicant has completed cultural orientation, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranges for the applicant's flight to the United States.¹¹³

At this point, the applicant is also screened by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). CBP checks the applicant against the National Targeting Center-Passenger program.¹¹⁴ The applicant is also checked against the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight Program.¹¹⁵

Provided that no issues emerge, the refugee is admitted to the United States and representatives from local resettlement agencies welcome the refugee at the airport. They provide guidance and support during the resettlement process in the United States.

107. Amy Pope, the White House, "Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States," (Nov. 20, 2015), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>.

108. The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "Security Screening of Refugees Admitted to the United States," available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/57a24d23893fc0eb3919ad0f/1470254386734/USCRI+Security+Screening+Process+%285.16.16%29.pdf>.

109. Refugee Council USA, "The Rigorous Process of Screening Refugees for Resettlement to the United States," available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/588108379f74567afd5b2f9f/1484851255926/RCUSA+Refugee+Security+Screening+Backgrounder++January+2017.pdf>.

110. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," at <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/index.htm>.

111. Amy Pope, the White House, "Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States," (Nov. 20, 2015), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>.

112. Ibid.

113. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Refugee Admissions Program," at <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/admissions/index.htm>.

114. Refugee Council USA, "The Rigorous Process of Screening Refugees for Resettlement to the United States," available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/577d437bf5e231586a7055a9/t/588108379f74567afd5b2f9f/1484851255926/RCUSA+Refugee+Security+Screening+Backgrounder++January+2017.pdf>.

115. Ibid.

Appendix C: List of Meeting Participants

Abdiwahab Ali

Sergeant
Minneapolis Police Department

Rachael Arietti

Research Associate
Police Executive Research Forum

Kristine Arneson

Assistant Chief
Minneapolis Police Department

Laurence Benenson

Policy and Advocacy Manager
National Immigration Forum

Carmen Best

Assistant Chief
Seattle Police Department

Chris Blue

Chief
Chapel Hill (NC) Police Department

Tim Bowen

Interim Safety and Security Advisor
International Rescue Committee

Maggie Brunner

Research Associate
Police Executive Research Forum

Ruben Chandrasekar

Executive Director
International Rescue Committee, Maryland

Ivan Chatman

Sergeant
Las Vegas Metro Police Department

Cheryl Crawley

Captain
Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department

Jennifer Doran-Pena

Statewide Refugee Coordinator
International Rescue Committee, Kansas

Andrew Geraghty

Program Analyst, U.S. Democracy Program
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Sean Gladieux

Captain
Greensboro (NC) Police Department

Phet Guiney

Police Service Officer
San Diego Police Department

Kevin Hall

Captain
Tuscon Police Department

Natasha Haunsperger

Officer
Portland (OR) Police Bureau

Scott Hoffman

Assistant Chief
Missoula (MT) Police Department

Jabe Hunter

Assistant Chief
Chapel Hill (NC) Police Department

Cristie Jacobsen

Officer
Fargo (ND) Police Department

Adam Kemerer

Research Assistant
Police Executive Research Forum

Sasha Larkin

Sergeant
Las Vegas Metro Police Department

Jodi Larson-Farrow

Case Management Supervisor
Boise Agency for New Americans

Kathy Lester

Acting Deputy Chief
Sacramento Police Department

Geri Mannion

*Director, U.S. Democracy Program and the
Special Opportunities Fund*
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Darryl McSwain

Assistant Chief
Montgomery County (MD) Police Department

Elizabeth Miller

Research Associate
Police Executive Research Forum

Adamou Mohamed

Grassroots Organizer
Church World Service of Greensboro, NC

Asad Mohamed

Police Service Officer
San Diego Police Department

Kathy Morante

Director, Office of Professional Accountability
Metropolitan Nashville Police Department

Borka Paponjak

Resettlement & Placement Manager
International Rescue Committee, Seattle

David Parker

Senior Advisor to the Chief
Salt Lake City Police Department

Mattie Provost

Assistant Chief
Houston Police Department

Bhuvan Pyakurel

Grassroots Organizer
Community Refugee & Immigration Services of
Columbus, OH

Jami Resch

Lieutenant
Portland (OR) Police Bureau

Dustin Robinson

Officer
Boise Police Department

Josh Scharman

Deputy Chief
Salt Lake City Police Department

Jamey Schwab

Lieutenant
Louisville Metro Police Department

Gavin Seiler

Deputy Chief
Wichita Police Department

Keith Squires

Commissioner
Utah Department of Public Safety

Kenneth Stesin

Research Intern
Police Executive Research Forum

Michael Terry

Captain
Greensboro (NC) Police Department

Abraham To

Chairman
Vietnamese/Indochinese Advisory Board of
San Diego

Theresa Tobin

Deputy Chief
New York City Police Department

Jessica Toliver

Director of Technical Assistance
Police Executive Research Forum

Darryl Tolleson

Deputy Chief
Atlanta Police Department

Jimmy Vaughan

Major
Dallas Police Department

Mike Villa

Chief
Tukwila (WA) Police Department

Chuck Wexler

Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum

Richard Worley

Major
Baltimore Police Department

Paul Yang

Sergeant
San Diego Police Department

Girma Zaid

Board Member
African Community Center, Las Vegas



Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 930
Washington, DC 20036
202-466-7820
202-466-7826 fax
www.PoliceForum.org

We provide progress in policing.