

Increasing Community Connections

Lessons from Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees (POWR)

USCCB/MRS Webinar

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Presenter:

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Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation

Study Findings & Food for Thought

How can RISE results benefit program delivery and allocation of resources? (...) Given the very high correlation of *Social Bridging* with other integration pathways and the *Overall Integration* score, **could RISE findings be used to support an increased focus on programs that help build refugees' social networks?**

RISE study - p. #65

Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees

Program Overview & Goals

In the midst of the economic downturn, MRS launched the Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees (POWR) Program, offering \$3 million to 50 dioceses. This grant money is now being used to augment services in the following areas:

- 1. Recruit volunteers** to help with mentoring, jobs, transportation & housing
- 2. Increase donations** to fund new refugee services
- 3. Organize special events and outreach activities**

RISE Study Findings

Social Networking Matters

[...] **Those with low integration repeatedly related experiences of isolation.** Most felt safe at home, but they resisted venturing outside the home, where the world felt unfamiliar and unsafe. Although older respondents seemed to brighten when discussing excursions they took through church or adult daycare, these experiences were limited to once or twice a week.

RISE study- p. #30

Suggestions for Improved Refugee Programming

Increasing Community Connections

Three Goals:

1. Offer opportunities for refugees to **gain self-confidence**.
2. Bolster initiatives aimed at **increasing social networking** opportunities for refugees.
3. Match refugees with American-born peers to prevent isolation & **create community connections**.

Giving Refugees More Voice

The Refugee Storyteller Project in Nashville

In Nashville, Tennessee, the POWR program has received training and resource support from its regional public television station, to train 15 staff members and clients to become videographers, who will tell stories about American life from a refugee perspective.

Successes:

- Refugees gain self-confidence and make social connections.
- The agency gets to keep two video cameras, laptop computers and video editing software, so it can continuously highlight clients' success stories.
- Donations have been used to enroll more clients in training programs.

RISE Study Findings

Mentoring Matters

Those who progress along the integration pathways do not do it alone. They rely on family and friends to pool financial resources, housing, child care, food, and information, and **they rely on informants and navigators from within and outside their ethnic and language groups. This support and these networks seem critical to integration success.**

RISE study- p. #31

Connecting Refugees to Mentors

Employment Ministry @ POWR in Atlanta

1. In this project, the local POWR program in Atlanta has established a **committee of mock coaches**, who act as references, job coaches and career counselors.
2. **Parish volunteers tutor refugees with limited English proficiency and offer one-on-one help** with resume writing, interviewing and job readiness training. Volunteers prepare refugees for their first jobs in the U.S. by offering speed-interviewing sessions.
3. Refugees **expand social networks & gain self-confidence.**

RISE Study Findings

Language Proficiency Matters

(...) lack of English ability was pervasive among those with low integration. ... **Lack of English kept many with low integration isolated. As a result, American culture confounded them. Specifically, they had little direct experience or support from others in understanding and negotiating educational, social, medical, and government systems.**

RISE study - p. #30

Matching Refugees with Americans

Report from a *Family Friend* at CC Atlanta

“It has been such a pleasure to be a “family friend” to *Hassan, *Iman and their five children. When I first started visiting them, we spent time on English vocabulary. As Iman and I got to know each other more, we discovered we both love to cook. She loves to have her family’s favorite foods for me to try, and in return, I bring them some of my family’s favorite foods. We enjoy talking and tasting over a cup of tea. Iman spent time studying in the evenings for the driver’s permit test. Any time we were in the car together, she would question me on driving laws. It was a very exciting day when I took her to take the test – she passed on her first try! She was so proud. I was so happy to be able to share that with her.

We have done everything from doctor’s appointments, WIC appointments, grocery shopping, and visits to Catholic Charities Atlanta. While in the car the children like to learn English words and sing the ABC song.

Although Iman’s family and mine come from different religions, we recognize that we love the same God. She asks for my prayers for her family that is still in Syria, and whenever I leave her home she wishes me “the God bless and save your family”. It is an honor to be their “family friend.”

Andrea McMahan, Refugee Resource Developer, amcmahan@catholiccharitiesatlanta.org

* Names changed to protect privacy of clients. 10

Connecting Refugees with Mentors

Volunteering Resources

The following volunteer orientation manuals were developed with the support of the POWR program. Some of the guidance may be replicable in the context of your agency's parish volunteer program.

- [Family Mentor Manual](#) (Anchorage, Alaska)
- [Meals Committee Information Packet](#) (Anchorage)
- [Transportation Committee Information Packet](#) (Anchorage)
- [Volunteer Documentary](#) (Jacksonville, Florida)
- [USCCB Volunteer Management Resources](#) (Section on *Volunteerism*)

The following resources are available on MRS's [My Membership Blog](#):

- Mentor Program Manual (Charlotte, North Carolina)
- Welcoming the Stranger Refugee Apartment Sponsorship Kit (Charlotte)
- Refugee Ambassador Guide (Indianapolis, Indiana)
- Vol. 1 - Resettlement Services (Richmond, Virginia)
- Vol. 2 - Volunteer Roles and Job Descriptions (Richmond)
- Vol. 3 - Volunteer Service Agreement & Record (Richmond)

SAMPLE

How to Organize Volunteer Work

Volunteering Resources

It's important to assign specific tasks. Consider the following approaches to organizing your volunteers, and see what works best for your program:

1. Organized by project

- Warm Meals
- Transportation
- Job Coaching/ESL

2. Organized by time period

- Pre-Arrival: Welcoming Team Committee and/or Mentor Team Volunteers
- Post-Arrival: Refugee Mentor, ESL Mentor and/or Mentor Team

3. Organized by level of expertise or need

- Pro-bono lawyers
- Nurses
- Graduate students of social work

Community Support Matters

POWR Program Successes

Select POWR program accomplishments 2010-14:

- Recruited **13,000 new volunteers.**
- Formed **more than 350 new parish and community partnerships.**
- Created **new social service and parish mentorship programs** tackling transportation, housing, jobs, food, language, legal and health care issues.



Literature

Randy Capps, Kathleen Newland, Susan Fratzke, Susanna Groves, Michael Fix, Margie McHugh, and Gregory Auclair: *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges*. Migration Policy Institute Report, June 2015

The Caritas of Austin, [Vocabulary Picture Guides Covering the Food Industry and Hotel Housekeeping](#) (Arabic, Burmese, Nepali, Swahili, Spanish). |

City College of San Francisco: [Vocational English as a Second Language Curriculum and Lesson Plans](#).

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Kristin Keller: [Refugee Resettlement in Oakland: Improving the Volunteer-Client Encounter](#), 2013.

Stacey A. Shaw and Patrick Poulin: *Findings from an Extended Case Management U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program*, 2014 .

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