THE HATFIELD PRIZE 2022

Removing Barriers to Food Security Among Refugees in Buffalo, New York

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A Better Way: Youth Diversion as an Alternative to Youth Probation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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Access to Culturally Competent Child Care Services for Refugee Families in Clarkston, Georgia

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CENTER FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

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ABOUT THE HATFIELD PRIZE

The Hatfield Prize is awarded annually to three student-faculty pairs from Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) schools. Recipients conduct research on social policies that impact vulnerable children, families, and communities, and explore the impact of these policies in their local communities. This semester-long research project culminates in three policy reports that make recommendations for both government and civil society institutions in contributing to policies that promote flourishing communities. The Hatfield Prize is named in honor of the late Senator Mark O. Hatfield, who served as a United States senator from Oregon for three decades, and was known for his principled Christian faith and for his commitment to working across differences to find common ground.

ABOUT SHARED JUSTICE

Shared Justice, the Center for Public Justice's initiative for 20- and 30-somethings, exists to equip the next generation of leaders with a hopeful vision and framework for Christian engagement in public life. Through its online publication, SharedJustice.org, CPJ has published hundreds of articles written by college students and young adults committed to pursuing justice for their neighbors through political engagement. Shared Justice also offers a variety of programs and resources, including The Hatfield Prize, books and resources such as Unleashing Opportunity: Why Escaping Poverty Requires a Shared Vision of Justice, and campus speaking engagements. Visit www.sharedjustice.org to learn more.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

The Center for Public Justice (CPJ) is an independent, nonpartisan organization devoted to policy research and civic education. Working outside the familiar categories of right and left, conservative and liberal, we seek to help citizens and public officeholders respond to God's call to do justice. Our mission is to equip citizens, develop leaders, and shape policy in pursuit of our purpose to serve God, advance justice, and transform public life. Visit www.cpjustice.org to learn more.

CENTER FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

Foreword

I am thrilled to introduce the Center for Public Justice's 2022 Hatfield Prize reports. I want to thank Grace, Kyle, and Rachel for all of the hard work they put into their research and writing and thank their faculty mentors as well for their guidance and support.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the hours of guidance and support Katie Thompson and Seth Billingsley provided to these students. Katie shepherded these students through the beginning and middle stages of their research. Seth, a recipient of the 2021 Hatfield Prize, stepped up to assist these students through the editorial process and across the finish line.

This year's policy reports examine social policies that impact the well-being of children, teens, and families, specifically at-risk youth and refugee families. The student-faculty pairs researched programs to improve refugee food security in Buffalo, NY; youth diversion programs as a hopeful alternative to youth probation in Cumberland County, PA; and programs to improve access to child care for refugees in Clarkston, GA.

Each report explores the scope of the issue on both a national and local level, highlights racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities, and frames solutions in the context of both government policies as well as the vital contributions of faith-based organizations, churches, and other civil society institutions. Divided into three sections — Discover, Frame, and Engage — each report is designed to provide a framework for understanding each issue within a federal, state, and local context.

DISCOVER introduces readers to a specific social policy in the United States and examines the current response of the federal government in addressing the issue and its impact on individuals and families facing new or worsened economic hardship due to COVID-19.

FRAME articulates the normative Christian principles which support the social safety net, considers the unique responsibilities and contributions of government and civil society institutions, and makes concrete recommendations.

ENGAGE brings Discover and Frame to life, telling the stories of impacted individuals and the communities in which they live. This section features original reporting by the student-faculty pairs in New York, Pennsylvania, and Georgia.

Together the 2022 Hatfield Prize reports offer a snapshot of the challenges at-risk youth and refugees face. Yet they also offer a hopeful vision, rooted in Christian principles, for how we can collectively respond by supporting the refugee families and justice-involved youth in our communities. The Hatfield Prize reports can be accessed online at www.cpu-justice.org.

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Removing Barriers to Food Security Among Refugees in Buffalo, New York

By Grace Retz & Dr. Michael Ritter

DISCOVER

Today is the day. After years of waiting within the confines of the Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Uganda, you and your family finally have the chance to start over. You fled your home seven years ago to escape the encroachment of violent groups against your village. Since then, you have built your life within the refugee camp. Your two children, both born at Bidi Bidi, have never experienced life outside the settlement. Today, that all changes — your family has received approval for resettlement. You think of what lies ahead as you board the airplane that will take you to your new home across the Atlantic Ocean: The United States of America. You have heard about this country in the news and in movies, and you cannot wait to start over again in the land of opportunity.

Sadly, over the next several months, your excitement fades. While you navigate the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual challenges that come with leaving your home behind and settling in a foreign country, you also face a daily reminder that you struggle to meet your family's basic needs due to limited resources. America is expensive, and you feel ill prepared.

Your new apartment is located in an economically depressed neighborhood, devoid of any grocery stores within walking distance. Transportation to a grocery or pharmacy requires lots of time as public transportation options are limited and difficult to navigate; you do not own a car. When you do manage to arrive at a grocery store, you struggle to find foods that you recognize and know how to cook. In addition, you and your spouse continue to struggle to find steady employment, making it nearly impossible for you to afford consistent and healthy food for your family. You spend many nights eating smaller portions so that your children have enough to eat.

This story, while fictional, reflects the reality that many refugees who resettle in the United States face, including high rates of food insecurity which can persist for years. While many factors contribute to food insecurity, this report will focus on the roles played by employment, transportation and language.

Scope of the Problem

Around the world today, there are an estimated 82.4 million people forcibly displaced due to war, famine, natural disasters and persecution, and 26.4 million of them are refugees.[1] Defined by the United Nations Refugee Agency as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion," refugees face immense challenges.[2] For those living in refugee camps around the world, the prospects of resettling to another location are rather grim. In 2020, of the 26.4 million refugees in the world, only 34,400 — about 0.1 percent — successfully resettled to another country. Roughly 251,000 returned to their home countries.[3] Some refugees have lived their entire lives within the confines of a refugee camp, and between 2018 and 2020, roughly one million children were born with refugee status.[4]

This report will focus on refugees who are resettled in the United States, a nation that has historically contributed to a large portion of global resettlements. The system for modern refugee resettlements to the U.S. was established in 1980 with the passage of the Refugee Act.[5] Since then, the U.S. has "resettled more refugees than any other country."[6] Despite this leadership, refugees in the U.S. face numerous challenges, including a difficulty in finding food.

Sadly, many refugees who resettle to the U.S. experience high rates of food insecurity. Food security is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the: "access by all people

at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."[7] Conversely, food insecurity is defined as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."[8] In 2020, 10.5 percent of all households in the U.S. were classified as food insecure at some point during the year.[9] Data suggests that a disproportionate percentage of refugees experience food insecurity. One case study of West African refugees resettled in Northeastern United States found that just over half of the population was food insecure.[10] Another study conducted among Liberian refugees who emigrated to the U.S. in the early 2000s reported even higher rates closer to 85 percent.[11]

Food insecurity rates tend to be higher among refugees in their first year of resettlement: 73 percent of refugee households who lived in the U.S. for less than one year experienced food insecurity in 2010, compared to a substantially lower 33 percent of households who emigrated over three years prior.[12]

Food insecurity greatly impacts the health and wellbeing of those who experience it. Inadequate access to food can cause malnutrition and key nutrient deficiencies. The most severe cases of food insecurity happen when a person or family runs completely out of food and goes at least a full 24 hours without eating.[13] However, even more moderate periods of food insecurity carry negative health consequences. Moderate food insecurity is characterized by uncertainty about where food will come from.[14] In these cases, families may turn to processed foods, because these foods can be the least expensive and most readily available options, even though they are low in nutritional value.[15] Consumption of these foods can contribute to illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes and obesity. While these health concerns are prevalent throughout the general population, refugees in the U.S. often experience higher rates of these chronic illnesses.[16]

Food insecurity also carries serious social outcomes. Nutritional deficiencies contribute to low birth weights and cognitive development problems in children. Consequently, "better childhood nutrition will increase schooling outcomes," and "ensure better education."[17] For adults, increased food security leads to better decision-making, improving labor productivity and leading to overall economic growth.[18]

Factors Linked with Food Insecurity Among Refugees

Socioeconomic status serves as a key indicator of food insecurity among refugee households in the United States. Refugee incomes often fall below the national average in the years following initial resettlement. The median household income of refugee arrivals between 2009 and 2011 is $42,000, nearly $8,000 lower than the median income of the U.S. born population.[19] During that same period, "more than half of refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Burma, Bhutan and Liberia had household incomes below twice the federal poverty level — versus one-third of U.S. natives."[20]

Economically struggling families often face tradeoffs in budgeting. Bills and other financial obligations draw valuable resources away from already limited resources. West African refugees living in the Northeastern United States described this reality with the words "Small money — large bills."[21] However, refugees face unique financial strains when it comes to buying food. Culturally familiar foods, for instance, often cost more than other, more common foods found in American grocery stores.[22] Refugees also frequently channel money to family members outside the U.S. Hadley et al. write: "Obligations to family both in West Africa and in the USA were cited by several respondents as a significant strain on familial resources."[23]

Transportation Challenges

Access to transportation and geographic location also play a significant role in refugee food security. Due to the economic restraints of resettlement agencies, refugees often settle into low-income areas where access to fresh foods and produce are limited and access to grocery stores is minimal. These neighborhoods, often called food deserts, are defined by the USDA as communities that "lack stores that sell healthy and affordable food."[24] In these communities, the distance from grocery stores is often too far to walk. Public transportation is sometimes available, albeit unreliable and time consuming.[25] Lack of transportation options, as well as unfamiliarity with the location, can prevent

refugees from accessing the resources they need.[26]

A study of Somali, Bantu and Liberian refugees indicated that roughly one-third of participants found it difficult to travel to a grocery store.[27] One interviewee explained that she only shopped for groceries once a month because she lacked her own personal transportation: "I ask somebody to drive; I just buy everything."[28] Another study of Burmese refugees in New York state also found that "limited transportation was a barrier to reaching food destinations."[29] For refugees across the country, travel poses immense challenges to living a healthy lifestyle.

Language Barriers

Language presents another commonly identified barrier to food security. Refugees in the U.S. speak a diverse range of languages. For instance, the refugees who settled in fiscal year 2013 spoke at least 162 different languages, and "1,277 spoke what can only be classified as 'other minor languages.'"[30] Many of these languages are spoken by less than 50 people in the entire U.S.[31]

Further complicating language differences is the fact that refugees who arrive in the U.S. have limited English proficiency. The Migration Policy Institute reported that 58 percent of refugees were still Limited English Proficient (LEP), even after living in the U.S. for 20 years or more.[32] In a study of West African refugees, difficulty understanding people due to language barriers increased the risk for food insecurity and its severity.[33] In a separate study, researchers found that refugees who were unable to read English experienced more difficulties acquiring food.[34] Learning a language proves challenging for anyone, especially for those with no teacher who speaks their native tongue.

Language creates difficulties for purchasing food by increasing the difficulty for refugees to navigate their new environments, especially when shopping for food. Refugees who lack information about where to shop for food are two-and-a-half times more likely to report food insecurity.[35]

Language barriers also contribute to unfamiliarity with food products. Wang et al. write "limited information about foods, shopping, and recipes in the United States creates another barrier to purchasing healthy foods."[36] Forty-six percent of refugees found it difficult to shop in the United States because they do not know the foods in the store.[37] Additionally, 63 percent of refugees living in a Midwestern city in the U.S. reported that they did not know how to cook with the foods found in American grocery stores.[38] Forty percent of refugees struggled to find a store with culturally familiar foods.[39] Consequently, a case study among Liberian refugees found that child hunger is more prevalent in households where mothers have difficulty navigating their new food environments.[40]

The COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 greatly exacerbated food insecurity for many Americans, both those who were already food-insecure as well as those who became newly food insecure. Job loss and the economic recession that followed the onset of the pandemic caused a substantial increase in food insecurity. In a 30-day study, the USDA found that the prevalence of food insecurity in households where a family member was unable to work because of the pandemic rose to 16.4 percent — a rate substantially higher than the national average of 5.7 percent.[41] Additionally, despite declines in food insecurity leading up to the pandemic, shortly after its onset the number of people seeking assistance at food banks more than doubled.[42]

Like other vulnerable populations, refugees were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Many refugees are employed as frontline workers at grocery stores, hospitality and health care services, sectors of the economy that were hit hardest by the pandemic.[43] Thus, financial hardships worsened for many refugee families. Food banks were also overwhelmed during the pandemic, limiting the resources available to those in need. Furthermore, the food that was available at food banks was often not fresh, healthy or culturally appropriate.[44]

Responses to Refugee Food Insecurity

An array of factors contributes to high rates of food insecurity among refugees living in the United States. Low socioeconomic status, transportation challenges and language barriers each

intertwine to hinder the ability of refugees to access healthy and culturally appropriate foods consistently. These effects are felt most acutely among recently resettled refugees and improve moderately over time.[45] Nonetheless, refugee food insecurity rates still outpace that of the general population. The federal government, recognizing the unique challenges that refugees face upon arrival, has several established programs that aid refugees in the resettlement process and that target food insecurity specifically.

Resettlement

The resettlement process involves the collaboration of multiple government and civil society institutions, both faith-based and secular. First, the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) works with other global partners such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to identify candidates for resettlement.[46] From there, candidates are referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and processed by a Resettlement Support Center.[47] Processing includes interviews and security screenings, which are then reviewed and decided upon by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.[48]

The federal government works closely with nine resettlement agencies across the United States to place refugees into communities where they will thrive; the majority of these resettlement agencies are faith-based, such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and World Relief.[49] When deciding where to place refugees, resettlement agencies take numerous factors into account, including the connections families may already have in the U.S., as well as housing, schools, health care and other available resources.[50]

The federal partnership continues even after initial resettlement. The State Department's Reception and Placement program "supplies resettlement agencies with a one-time sum per refugee to finance their first 30-90 days in the U.S."[51] This funding often goes towards rent, furniture, food and other expenses for refugee families.[52] After this period of initial financial support ends, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provides refugees with "longer-term cash and medical assistance, as well as other social services, including language classes and employment training."[53] Many refugees remain food-insecure despite the allocation of these funds and resources.

Food Assistance

Additionally, federal food assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provide valuable resources to refugees. SNAP delivers funds every month for food to individuals whose incomes fall below a certain threshold every month.[54] Refugees, however, are exempt from the conditions required of non-citizens; they do not have to meet the residency requirement of five years, nor do they need to have 40 quarters of work to obtain benefits.[55] Additionally, the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill ensured that refugees in the United States are eligible for SNAP benefits indefinitely.[56]

The same resettlement agencies which assist in initial resettlement also help coordinate and connect refugees with social services including SNAP.[57] The 2017 Annual Survey of Refugees Report to Congress found that 56 percent of refugees in the United States received SNAP benefits between the fiscal years of 2012-2016.[58] In a smaller study among Bhutanese refugees, researchers found that each participant was utilizing SNAP benefits, and roughly half of participants relied solely on SNAP to purchase their groceries.[59] In a series of interviews, one participant explained that: "If there is not [a] food stamp, it is very difficult to buy things and prepare meals for [my] family."[60]

State governments collaborate with local agencies to bolster the effects of SNAP with nutrition education classes called SNAP Ed.[61] Designed to teach "participants how to make healthy choices within limited budgets," this program ensures that refugees know how to best utilize their assistance.[62] Unfortunately, while nutrition education programs are proven to be effective at increasing food security, refugees may not reap their benefits as low English proficiency, low literacy rates and transportation barriers contribute to difficulty accessing SNAP Ed resources.[63]

Translation Materials
In an attempt to make public benefits more accessible to people with limited proficiencies in English, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency" in August 2000. This Executive Order requires "federal agencies to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP) and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons can have meaningful access to them."[64] Implementation of this order resulted in the expansion of translated government resources, as well as training for federal employees on how to "identify an LEP person's language and provide meaningful language assistance across a wide array of real life situations."[65]

Federal food assistance programs, health education and increased access for non-native English speakers all help refugees better access the basic necessities for life, but unfortunately much work remains to be done. Despite efforts from the federal government to support refugees, many continue to experience high levels of food insecurity. Financial, transportation and language barriers continue to significantly hinder their ability to obtain sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food.

A public justice response to strengthening the social safety net for refugees requires a multifaceted approach inclusive of both government and civil society institutions which are often in close contact with refugee families. Beginning with resettlement and continuing into longer residence,

FRAME

these institutions play pivotal roles both in directly and indirectly alleviating refugee food insecurity.

Day after day, the world reminds us of its brokenness. News stations ring loudly with the sounds of injustice; social media broadcasts stories of increasing violence, persecution, disaster and war. In 2021 alone, 82.4 million people around the world were forced from their homes; of those many millions, 26.4 million received refugee status.[66] With each passing day, these already staggering numbers increase. Considering these challenges, how should followers of Christ respond?

Scripture provides Christians with guidance on the difficult task of serving suffering neighbors. From a Biblical perspective, "neighbor" extends well beyond the confines of a gated community or even zip code. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that our neighbors include those outside our national, religious, social and political groups. Rather, even the communities we despise the most, such as the Samaritans for Jesus' Jewish audience, are our neighbors.[67]

Galatians 3 echoes this powerful idea: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[68] Today, as in Jesus' time, Christians bear a neighborly responsibility to all people. American Christians possess a responsibility to care for those in need, regardless of whether they live at home or abroad. Part of this calling to service must involve welcoming and caring for refugees who have experienced forceful removal or flight from their homes.

Christ — himself a refugee — emphasizes the importance of welcoming strangers in Matthew 25 saying, "I was a stranger and you invited me in."[69] God gave the Israelites a similar command in the Old Testament. God called his chosen people to love those who were foreigners and sojourners, just as the Israelites had lived as foreigners in Egypt. Deuteronomy 10 describes God's disposition towards refugees by including them among other isolated and vulnerable classes: "[God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing."[70]

Considering God's care for refugees, our care must extend beyond initial admission into the United States and should likewise holistically address their physical needs. A Christian orthopraxy does not neglect the importance of the physical body. From first creation in the garden and throughout the rest of Scripture, the Bible illustrates the intrinsic value of the body as made "in the image of God," and as a "temple of the Holy Spirit."[71] In response to hunger and food insecurity in the Bible, God extends

his hand to his people, meeting their bodily needs.

When the Israelites hungered in the wilderness, God provided manna from the skies.[72] Later in Matthew, Jesus instructs his followers not to worry about food, because their heavenly father will provide. Pointing to creation he says: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them."[73] Although God instructs his people not to worry, he still provides for them.

A biblically just approach to addressing contemporary food insecurity should therefore promote a more equitable food environment for all members of society, including refugees. Increasing the overall wellbeing of refugees in the U.S. requires a proactive, upstream approach that strengthens the existing social safety net and tackles the root causes of food insecurity. Government and civil society institutions each play a valuable role in building a more just system for those who find refuge in the United States.

Government's Role in Addressing Food Insecurity

"Nothing can be more important to a state than its public health; the state's paramount concern should be the health of its people."[74] These powerful words spoken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt reflect the critical importance of promoting the overall health of society. Food security serves as a vital prerequisite for achieving good public health, the conditions necessary to promote flourishing for all members of society. Food security improves the quality of life in our communities by laying the foundation for better decision making, education, labor productivity, and economic growth.[75]

On the other hand, food insecurity places a substantial burden on the U.S. health care system, costing roughly $52.9 billion each year.[76] Food insecurity carries substantial social and economic costs which impact both food-insecure and food-secure individuals. Therefore, as a society, "we are not only individuals, we are also a community and a body politic, and that we have shared commitments to one another."[77]

Refugees, despite contributing greatly to the U.S., require particular attention due to increased probability for food insecurity. For this reason, increased attention must be given to refugee food insecurity by the U.S. government. Refugees who settle in the U.S. contribute greatly to its rich diversity, and each refugee brings unique gifts and talents to their communities. The value of refugees in American culture is indisputable. Moreover, refugees actively contribute to the growth and development of the United States.[78] They have high rates of employment and entrepreneurship, rates that in some cases are higher than the native-born population.[79] Refugees enhance life in the U.S. in many ways and yet they experience high levels of food insecurity.[80]

SNAP Recommendations

The federal government currently promotes food security through both direct and indirect aid programs. Direct aid programs provide resources directly to those in need, while indirect aid programs "[rely] on partnerships with civil society institutions to provide the services to their communities" using federal funding.[81] Indirect aid programs often target root causes of food insecurity, such as addressing unemployment, providing financial training, or building community support. Direct aid programs, however, often combat food insecurity directly through cash.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides one example of a successful direct aid program administered by the federal government. SNAP provides families in need with money every month on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card.[82] These cards operate like debit cards and allow the cardholder to purchase food. Families with varying levels of need receive commensurate levels of support based on the size of the family and their household income.[83] As discussed previously, refugee resettlement agencies often connect their clientele with SNAP benefits, and refugee status relieves those families from many of the eligibility requirements for citizens. Regardless, many refugees still experience food insecurity, despite their usage of SNAP.[84]

To increase the effectiveness of SNAP among refugee communities, the federal government must first and foremost reevaluate the amount

of funds being allocated for food assistance to determine if they are sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of the population. For instance, in 2019, only 36 percent of SNAP participants received the maximum monthly allotment.[85] Households receiving maximum SNAP benefits have no source of income, and therefore do not face any reductions on the amount of funds they receive.[86] The remaining households are expected to spend 30 percent of their income on groceries.[87]

However, this expectation may be infeasible for many families living in the U.S. The Food Research and Action Center argues that "the greatest shortcoming of SNAP is that benefits for most households are not enough to get them through the entire month without hunger or being forced to sacrifice nutrition quality."[88] The risk of food insecurity skyrockets in these households who do not receive enough SNAP funds to last the entire month.[89]

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government increased the amount of SNAP benefits given to households through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).[90] Under this act, state governments were allowed to issue emergency allotments to households receiving SNAP benefits.[91] These emergency allotments allowed households to receive the maximum allotment of SNAP dollars for their family size, without any deductions.[92] Elected officials should maintain these allotments, as they provide much needed support to vulnerable communities.[93] Programs such as these should be continued past the span of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they play a critical role in protecting families from the negative impacts of food insecurity.[94] These programs are especially beneficial for vulnerable populations such as refugees, whose SNAP dollars often run out by the end of the month.

The SNAP application process, however, could use improvement. Language barriers are commonly identified as a hindrance from applying for and utilizing SNAP benefits.[95] The translation of SNAP application materials into a wider variety of languages is another crucial step that must be taken to increase food security for refugees and other non-English speakers. Currently, translation occurs at the state level, resulting in translations for only a few of the most common languages. For instance, New York State's website that supplies information on how to utilize SNAP benefits only provides translations into seven major languages.[96] While this is a step toward increasing accessibility, it does not reflect the immense diversity found in smaller cities. In Buffalo, for instance, the top 10 languages spoken in public schools from 2014-2015 were Spanish, Arabic, Karen, Somali, Burmese, Swahili, Nepali, Bengali, Mai Mai and Kinyarwanda.[97] The New York State website only provides translations for two of these languages.[98] Translation of SNAP materials should shift to a more local approach, focusing on those in closest contact with the refugee populations.

Language barriers may also hinder refugee food security by exacerbating unfamiliarity with items in stores.[99] Many refugees prefer to eat culturally familiar foods and fresh produce over the processed foods in American grocery stores.[100] For SNAP to be more effective at reducing food insecurity in refugee populations, it must be accepted at a wider variety of retail stores. One way to achieve this goal is by forming coalitions with local farmers markets. With the right technology and licenses, farmers markets can accept SNAP benefits as payment. In 2017 alone, $24.4 million in SNAP benefits was redeemed at farmers markets.[101]

However, this figure still represents only a small portion of the total SNAP expenditures. One way to increase usage of SNAP benefits in these settings is through the support of state governments. The cost of technology and equipment needed to accept SNAP EBT at farmers markets can hinder many markets from making the switch; and only 11 out of the 50 states in the U.S. offer to cover these costs for farmers markets.[102] State funding of this technology would make healthier foods more readily available to refugees relying on SNAP.

Additionally, the federal government can foster food security through support of innovative programs that stretch SNAP dollars. The Fair Food Network's Double Up Food Bucks is one such initiative.[103] Through Double Up Food Bucks, SNAP recipients who buy fresh, unpro-

cessed fruits and vegetables can have their money matched.[104] This program not only expands the budgets of SNAP recipients, but also promotes healthier food choices. Despite its benefits, Double Up Food Bucks is only administered in 25 states. Federal support of this, and similar programs could increase food security nationwide.

Resettlement Recommendations

As noted above, there are nine resettlement agencies in the United States; each plays a crucial role in promoting the wellbeing of refugees in the nation. These agencies actively engage with refugees during the resettlement process and aim to place refugees into communities where they will thrive. However, in recent years, the Trump administration drastically reduced the annual ceiling for refugee admissions, which severely limited the efforts of resettlement agencies. The record-low number of refugees being admitted to the U.S. caused many agencies to cut staff and close offices.

In the Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Program for the 21st Century report, Mathema and Carratala write: "Since fiscal year 2017, national resettlement agencies have closed or zeroed out the budgets of approximately 134 partner sites across the country — a 38 percent decrease in overall resettlement capacity."[105] While the Biden administration has raised the annual ceilings, rebuilding the capacity of resettlement agencies is a necessity that will take time and will require significant funding and support from the government and other civil society organizations.[106]

Steadily instituting a higher annual ceiling for refugee admissions may help alleviate some of the stress that resettlement agencies have been facing, and likewise contribute to their ability to aid refugees who are settling in the United States. The federal government could make this possible through two courses of action. Congress could impose restrictions on how much the refugee admission ceiling can change each year. On the other hand, Congress could institute a minimum amount of funding for resettlement agencies. Both actions would limit extreme fluctuations in resources, like those that resettlement agencies have experienced in these last few years.

Civil Society's Role in Addressing Food Insecurity

Although the government plays a substantial role in addressing food insecurity, it alone cannot meet the needs of food insecure people living in the U.S., including refugees. Civil society institutions, such as resettlement agencies, faith-based and nonprofit organizations, and houses of worship, offer valuable resources and services which enhance and better the lives of the communities they touch.

Nonprofit Organizations and Resettlement Agencies

Working in close proximity to refugees, both resettlement agencies and refugee-facing nonprofits offer a wide array of resources and services to relocated families, such as workplace training, English classes and even legal services.[107] By connecting refugee families with SNAP and other financial assistance, resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations can also serve as an essential bridge between government funding and refugee families.

Despite assistance from nonprofit organizations, a large percentage of refugees remain food insecure. Nonprofit organizations must strengthen and supplement their services to address the diverse needs of refugees. One way to do so requires bolstering food assistance programs such as SNAP. As noted above, unfamiliarity with local food options and difficulty reading English in grocery stores contribute to high rates of food insecurity among refugee populations. Although changing the languages of items in stores or even expanding the products sold may be out of reach, nonprofits can teach refugee families how to cook with unfamiliar produce or could even shop for them.

Case workers and other employees should familiarize refugees with their new communities, stores and food items offered. Additionally, instituting cooking classes at local nonprofits may provide refugees with valuable information on how to use food items that they may not be familiar with in addition to allowing refugees to learn in a group environment with people they may already know.

Nonprofit organizations and resettlement agencies can also take steps early in the resettlement process to increase refugee food security. Studies have shown that refugees who are settled

into communities with members from their same ethnic group quickly develop social ties that facilitate their resettlement.[108] Furthermore, these established communities often provide a strong enough financial incentive for stores to carry culturally familiar foods.[109] These cultural and social ties make familiar food more readily available for new refugees, thus increasing their food security. For these reasons, nonprofits and resettlement agencies should prioritize placing refugees into communities where they will be able to quickly develop cultural and social connections. In a study of Burundi and Bhutanese refugees who had the same income, researchers found that Bhutanese refugees never faced any food shortages, while Burundi refugees would often go up to four days without food. When researchers evaluated the differences between these groups, they discovered "there was an established community of more than 300 Bhutanese in the city, but no Burundis."[110]

Houses of Worship

The United States hosts thousands of diverse faith communities, each with unique skills and values. Motivated by their faith to look outwards into their communities, they faithfully apply their religious values to serving the vulnerable. Unlike federal programs or even nonprofit organizations, houses of worship holistically address all aspects of a person's health — physical, mental, social and spiritual. These communities provide congregants with spiritual formation, community groups, grief and drug counseling and even social events for both children and adults. These crucial institutions support their communities and provide resources to make their congregants stronger. For refugees just arriving to the U.S., churches can holistically provide support to address their mental health needs and can supplement the efforts of government and nonprofit organizations.

First, churches can increase the physical wellbeing of refugees through the provision of food. For instance, many churches in the U.S. operate food pantries, a valuable resource to many refugees. One way to increase the impact of these food pantries in refugee communities is by carrying foods familiar to specific ethnic populations. Culturally familiar food pantries operated by churches can be further supplemented with translation materials. Church members can create translated food labels, and those with experience speaking other languages can volunteer their time to help refugees navigate the resources offered in the food pantries. Furthermore, in areas populated by many churches and houses of worship, it is critical that these institutions collaborate to form partnerships to best serve the needs of their communities.

In their policy report on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security, Seth Billingsley and Daniel Bennett write: "Managing a food pantry could easily exhaust the available funds for a small congregation, but if five or ten local houses of worship pooled their resources, even a small sum could be extended to serve a greater number of people."[111]

Businesses

Businesses in the United States also contribute significantly to the wellbeing of refugees. Enterprises like Panera Bread have acted in the fight against food insecurity through the provision of food as well as through financial support for nonprofit organizations. For instance, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Panera donated family meals to Feeding America, which then distributed them to partnering food banks across the country.[112]

Businesses have also taken steps to welcome refugees and facilitate their adjustment to life in the U.S. In 2021, 33 major companies joined the Tent Coalition for Afghan Refugees.[113] Companies such as Amazon, Chobani, Facebook, Gap and UPS are members of this partnership and are committed to "create job opportunities, provide training and other resources to help Afghans better integrate into the American economy."[114]

Amazon, for instance, has hired refugees to fill positions at transportation and fulfillment centers, as well as corporate roles. Refugees in these positions are paid over $18 an hour, receive benefits and are also eligible for Amazon's Career Choice Program "through which the company will fund full college tuition, high school completion, or English as a Second Language proficiency certification."[115]

These steps, by Amazon and other businesses in the U.S., are critical in the promotion of food security in refugee populations. To further improve the wellbeing of refugees in America, businesses should continue to pledge their support through material or financial donations, as well as through the employment of refugees in their midst.

Refugee food insecurity continues to plague the United States today, despite efforts to quell its impact by government and civil society organizations. Far too many refugees struggle to find affordable, culturally familiar foods, leaving them at risk for serious health conditions. While many organizations currently work to fight against this economic challenge, many elements still require addressing.

The effectiveness of SNAP and other programs could be increased, as could accessibility to culturally known foods and documents translated to native tongues. Perhaps most importantly, the resettlement process must be systematically reevaluated to ensure a smoother transition for refugees into life in America. Altogether, a just approach to addressing refugee food insecurity is only possible through the collaboration of government, nonprofit organizations, resettlement agencies and houses of worship.

ENGAGE

Sitting at a table in the basement of my campus library, I logged into Zoom. Two years prior, I might have made the drive one and a half hours north, but still living under the shadow of COVID-19 meant that I would need to visit Buffalo, New York virtually. My tour guides had no experience in tourism, but they work every day to help make Buffalo home for the many refugees who resettle there: they dismantle language barriers, combat food insecurity and work to implement friendly government policies for sojourners. These people eagerly spoke about their experiences building a better Buffalo, a city which serves as an important case study in how to address refugee food insecurity in the United States.

Background

Buffalo, New York serves as a center for refugee resettlement. In recent years, the town earned the nickname, "The City of Good Neighbors." However, this has not always been true. For many years, the city battled rapid depopulation rates; then, miraculously, between the years 2000 and 2014, depopulation dramatically slowed.[1] A large contributor to the town's success: 32.3 percent of Buffalo's population, comprised of immigrants and refugees.

While the available population data includes both immigrants and refugees in its scope, it remains clear that foreign-born residents critically contribute to the Buffalo community. Immigrants and refugees alike provide immense value and support to the economy.

In 2014, for instance, refugees and immigrants preserved 3,116 manufacturing jobs which would have otherwise "vanished or moved elsewhere."[2] Additionally, these residents bring valuable entrepreneurial action to the city. In 2014, nearly 3000 immigrants in Buffalo worked for themselves, and their businesses generated roughly $121 million in income.[3]

Buffalo continues to accept large numbers of refugees. In fiscal year 2021 alone, the Upstate New York region contributed to the highest percentage of refugee resettlements in the state at 91 percent.[4] Erie County in particular settled the most refugees out of any county in the state.[5] Altogether, Buffalo stands out as a leader for refugee resettlement in the state of New York, as well as throughout the country. Nonetheless, Buffalo still suffers from the challenges facing refugees today, including food insecurity.

Food Insecurity in New York State

Like many regions in the U.S., New York state wrestles with food insecurity. Just over 1 in 10 households experience the economic difficulty in securing food.[6] Additionally, 2.7 million New Yorkers, or roughly 1 in 7 people, rely upon SNAP.[7] These numbers powerfully indicate that the state has room to grow in providing access to food for its residents.

Erie County, which includes Buffalo, has a 15.4 percent prevalence of food insecurity.[8] However, studies indicate that refugee food insecurity rates often exceed those of the general population in any given locality or area of study; therefore, refugees in Buffalo likely experience food insecurity rates exceeding that 15.4 percent metric.[9] For instance, one study suggested that rates of food insecurity among refugees could reach staggering levels of up to 85 percent.[10]

As part of this project, and in partnership with Jericho Road, a faith-based community health center in Buffalo, 13 refugees were surveyed on their experiences of food insecurity. Although a small sample size, these 13 representatives paint a picture of the challenges facing refugees when looking to purchase food. Several surveyed individuals resonated with difficulty in purchasing enough food to last until the next paycheck, and one participant expressed that the food they purchased simply did not last.

One participant noted that transportation barriers impacted their ability to purchase food, while two other participants noted that they sometimes ran out of food before the end of the month. In all these cases, the people we interviewed experienced some level of food insecurity.

That said, the City of Good Neighbors has developed a number of innovative ways to welcome and serve refugees. Local faith-based and secular nonprofit organizations, churches and local government in Buffalo actively seek to increase the food security and overall well-being of refugees in their midst. These methods revolve around partnership between civil society, government and houses of worship.

Nonprofit Organizations

Journey's End Refugee Services, a faith-based nonprofit organization, actively engages refugees in the Buffalo area to promote their wellbeing and support them as they transition to life in the U.S. As one of the many resettlement agencies in New York State, Journey's End connects refugees with federal assistance during their first 90 days in the country.

Recognizing that many refugees will not completely assimilate during these short three months, Journey's End also offers many supplemental resources, including employment, education and legal services. These services ultimately aim to empower refugees in Buffalo, as reflected in the organization's value statement: "We offer our clients the information and tools they need to achieve personal goals, access opportunity and thrive in their new community."[11] Services directed at increasing employment and education play a crucial role in increasing refugee food security, as income and language are commonly identified barriers.

Additionally, Journey's End offers services specifically aimed at addressing refugee food security. The Green Shoots Program is a federally funded "educational urban farming program that provides adult refugees adaptive farming and marketing skills."[12] To learn more about the services offered by Journey's End, I sat down with Kathy Spillman, the Director of Marketing and Communications. She immediately emphasized the importance of this urban farming initiative.

Not only does urban farming increase access to fresh produce in a food desert, but it also serves as a source of comfort for refugees who come from rural farming areas. Spillman also highlighted the program as a source of "supplemental income" for the farmers. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares can be purchased by members of the community, putting money back into the hands of the refugee farmers, and increasing the broader community's access to fresh produce.

Food pantries can also powerfully increase food security within communities, but, as discussed above, refugees may not reap the full benefits of these resources due to cultural differences. Unfamiliarity with food items offered in food pantries, coupled with language barriers, may decrease the effectiveness of food pantries at increasing food security. Provisions 139, a culturally familiar, market-style food pantry in the West Side of Buffalo, seeks to address this disparity. Provisions 139 provides healthy food to their community, as well as yoga and nutrition classes.[13] These services holistically address multiple aspects of an individual's health and wellbeing.

To learn more about how Provisions 139 adapted to address the needs of refugees in the Buffalo community, I spoke with Crystal Selk, the Executive Director of West Side Community Services. She explained that Provisions 139 implements programming "that not only addresses those basic needs, but then also goes above and beyond and provides that quality of life for people."

Provisions 139 operates as a market-style food pantry, which means that clients hand-pick their food. Located inside a small corner store in Buffalo, Provisions 139 promotes dignity and agency for refugees seeking its services. Selk highlighted the value of this food pantry design. She says that Provisions 139 is effective at, "giving our customers that feeling that they're coming in and shopping for their family; and providing that level of dignity and support that everybody deserves when they're accessing food no matter if it's at Wegmans or Whole Foods or at Provisions 139."

Selk recognizes the need for increased food security among the refugee communities in Buffalo. She explained the role language plays as a unique barrier to food security among refugee populations, a barrier which Provisions 139 seeks to address. That is why, through partnerships with other nonprofit organizations in Buffalo, such as Jewish Family Services, Provisions 139 provides translation and interpretation services to the refugees accessing their food bank. Furthermore, Selk recognizes that refugees often search for culturally familiar foods. To meet this need, Provisions 139 actively collects demographic information from their clients to stock their food pantry with culturally familiar foods. This year alone, Provisions 139 provided Halal meat to roughly 250 Afghan evacuees in Buffalo.

Provisions 139 provides a perfect example of how building partnerships between businesses, nonprofit organizations and government can benefit those in need. Selk explained that the food pantry receives its nonperishable food items from Feed More America — a hunger relief organization. Additionally, businesses such as Wegmans — a grocery store chain — donate other foods like bread.

Finally, local colleges, such as D'Youville University, donate fresh produce weekly. Also, the pantry works with local government officials like Councilman Rivera, a state representative for the Niagara area, who donated 100 turkeys last year to distribute to the community for Thanksgiving. Selk explained that at Provisions 139, "we really work to leverage those relationships and bring complementary people together so that we can just do the best things for our people."

Churches

Churches and other houses of worship also play a critical role in increasing the wellbeing of refugees in the Buffalo area. Churches have the unique opportunity to provide holistic support to refugees resettling in the United States. Along with social, emotional and religious support, churches are able to fill critical gaps in services offered to refugees. The Augustana Lutheran Church in Buffalo provides an excellent example of a church meeting the unique needs of refugees.[14]

The Augustana Lutheran Church began as a Refugee and Immigrant Driving Program in 2007 dedicated to helping refugees and immigrants obtain their driver's licenses.[15] Since its start, the program has helped over 100 people from 30 countries obtain their driver's licenses.[16] The Refugee and Immigrant Driving Program addresses one of the main risk factors for refugee food security: transportation. As discussed earlier, lack of transportation options as well as unfamiliarity with location contributes to higher rates of food insecurity among refugee populations.[17]

This challenge was reiterated in an earlier interview with Kathy Spillman from Journey's End. In a discussion about food deserts and the lack of public transportation in Buffalo, she said: "It's really, really hard for people who have to get out to jobs that aren't close by. So, our refugees in particular really suffer from that. There are jobs out there, but they can't necessarily get to them because of the lack of public transportation." Thus, by improving transportation options through the Refugee and Immigrant Driving Program, the Augustana Lutheran Church can have a meaningful impact in increasing refugee food security.

Government

Government plays a leading role in assisting refugees as they resettle. The New York State government directs a number of programs for refugees managed through the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA), which was created in 2012 to assist refugees and immigrants in achieving self-sufficiency. Through close collaboration with resettlement agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses and local governments, ONA effectively increases the wellbeing of refugees in the state.

One of their programs in particular has the possibility to significantly improve refugee food security in the state: Cell Ed. ONA partnered with Cell Ed — an international tutoring company — in 2015 to create a pilot program aimed at providing English tutoring to refugees and immigrants through cell phones. Cell Ed is a free-to-access, 24/7 dial-in tutoring service.[18]

The Cell Ed team wrote about the benefits of this partnership with New York State, that even without a cell plan or internet connection, "a learner simply calls an assigned Cell-Ed number from their cell phone, listens to a lesson, reviews the lesson received via text and texts back responses. The learner receives additional support from a live coach and moves on to the next lesson."[19] As discussed earlier, language barriers commonly hinder refugees from accessing and utilizing foods in their new communities. The language and life skills provided by Cell Ed therefore have the ability to increase food security for these communities.

To get a better sense of their work, I spoke with a group of individuals from ONA. Jenny Munoz, who works with language access at the Office for New Americans, emphasized the importance of the Cell Ed program. She described it as "English for work and life." Cell-Ed meets refugees where they are and provides valuable English and life skills. Munoz explained: "We acknowledge that refugees … they may be more isolated. They may face public transportation issues. They may be caregivers and working full-time jobs and may find it difficult to attend, routinely, an ESOL classroom. We don't think Cell Ed replaces an ESOL classroom, but we do think that it allows you to flexibly keep improving your English…" One testimonial of the impact of Cell Ed comes from Candelaria, who works on a farm in the Hudson Valley. She said: "Cell-Ed opened a new world for me, now I can speak and understand English better. I was given new responsibilities at work; I don't need a translator to talk with my daughter's teacher and I even helped a family find an apartment."[20]

A Collaborative Approach

Each of the institutions listed above — government, nonprofits and churches — has distinct gifts when it comes to serving refugees. However, a collaborative approach is required to completely address the disproportionate rates of food insecurity in this population.

The collaboration between churches and nonprofit organizations can dramatically increase the wellbeing of refugees. Kathy Spillman, the Director of Marketing and Communications at Journey's End, explained how the support of churches in Western New York makes their work with refugees possible. She said: "The faith community is the cornerstone of our community support. …We could not do the work we do without the support of the faith community." Church groups provide critical donations, she explained. Some groups give financially to the mission of Journey's End, while others participate in a project called "Home Again," where they fill an apartment with furniture for a refugee family. Spillman closed by reiterating: "The faith community is integral to our work, for sure."

Matthew Soerens, U.S. Director of Church Mobilization for World Relief, understands the power of collaboration well. Soerens works to motivate local churches to welcome and serve refugees. In an interview, he explained that much of his work involves facilitating relationships between churches and refugees. "We want to help people identify refugees as people who are individually made in the image of God," he explained. A key part of his role involves communicating biblical truths about refugees to churches and communities and addressing misconceptions with unbiased data.

Churches mobilized by World Relief play an important role in funding key services for refugees.

Additionally, churches actively participate in advocacy, which Soerens describes as raising "voices on behalf of vulnerable people." Soerens explained, in one example of constructive advocacy, how members of the church mobilized in response to President Biden's initial refugee ceiling allotment.

Despite promises made during his campaign to increase the number of refugees allowed into the United States, President Biden affirmed the ceiling of 15,000 set by the Trump Administration. Soerens explained that World Relief successfully mobilized churches to call the White House and their senators in response. Shortly after, the ceiling was raised, allowing more refugees to resettle to the U.S. In this way and others, World Relief has successfully advocated for changes in policies critical to the well-being of refugees in the United States.

Cities of Good Neighbors

The city of Buffalo, New York serves as an important case study for how government and civil society can work together to improve the well-being of refugees. Buffalo offers many innovative services to refugees to increase their food security. Because food insecurity results from a combination of economic, transportation, and language barriers, it requires a multifaceted solution. The government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses and churches active in Buffalo provide an example for how to do this successfully.

These and other organizations mentioned above provide indispensable resources and skills to refugees struggling with food insecurity; however, work remains. Nonetheless, successful collaboration between government and civil society in the area offers hope for the city and the rest of the country. Programs in Buffalo should be replicated in other cities across the United States, especially those that accept large numbers of refugees.

This case study specifically demonstrates the value in addressing employment, transportation and language skills to ensure refugee food security. This holistic manner of caring for refugees, seen in Buffalo, is one we should seek to imitate elsewhere, and with time, will hopefully earn more cities the name: "The City of Good Neighbors."

A Better Way: Youth Diversion as an Alternative to Juvenile Probation in Harrisburg Pennsylvania

by Kyle Chu & Jason Renn, Ph.D.

DISCOVER

In early 2020, when the rapidly growing COVID-19 pandemic suddenly required schools to close, Grace — a 15-year-old high school student — struggled to adjust. Like many other students across the world, Grace lives with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which presents additional challenges for focusing on class and remaining in her seat. Although Grace experienced these additional difficulties while still physically attending classes, virtual school proved to be immensely more difficult. Grace, like many other ADHD students, routinely failed to turn assignments in on time once she moved to virtual schooling. Unlike other students, Grace's late assignments landed her in a juvenile detention facility.

Before the pandemic, Grace engaged in an altercation with her mother and later stole a classmate's cell phone from a locker. In response to her actions, a court placed Grace on a "zero-tolerance" probation which mandated that Grace regularly check-in with her caseworker, wear a GPS monitor, attend counseling, and complete her homework, among other requirements. Approximately one month into remote learning, Grace's case worker filed a violation of probation against Grace for her missing homework, despite protests from Grace's teacher who insisted her performance equalled that of her peers. Because Grace's probation carried a "zero-tolerance" mandate, that one filing was all it took for her to be sent away. Officers handcuffed Grace and took her to the detention facility.[1]

In the United States, courts sentence 500,000 youths to juvenile probation each year.[2] As Grace's story clearly displays, these probations can re-

sult in court-mandated incarceration for children for minor violations. Additionally, 55 percent of young people on probation are, like Grace, youth of color, which reflects the vast racial disparities within the juvenile justice system.[3]

Probation, a formal court disposition, requires adjudicated delinquents to satisfy a list of conditions for either a specified or open-ended amount of time under the surveillance of a probation officer.[4] Violations of probation conditions — called technical violations — often lead the offender back to court. Sometimes, as in Grace's case, that person can be incarcerated over a technical violation of probation.

In the juvenile justice system — which manages cases of youths 18 years or younger — probation is the most common disposition.[5] The National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) identifies juvenile probation as "the most likely sanction imposed by juvenile courts."[6] Fortunately, significant system reform over the past two decades has decreased the number of young people sent to juvenile detention centers and residential treatment facilities — from 107,493 in 1999 to 36,479 in 2019.[7] However, comparable degrees of reform have not followed for probation, which needs reform due to its inequitable, ineffective, and inefficient nature which all too often results in additional court proceedings and incarceration for youth.[8]

Understanding the Juvenile Justice System

According to the United States Department of Justice (DOJ), a successful juvenile justice system "enhances public safety, ensures that youth are held appropriately accountable to both crime victims and communities, and empowers youth to live productive, law-abiding lives."[9] In other words, the system ought to restore youths, their communities, and their families after criminal acts. This mandate carries two actionable requirements: to fairly punish youth for their crimes and to restore and build the capacities of each young person who enters the criminal justice system.[10]

In order to advance probation reform, the juvenile justice system must first receive a proper introduction. Individual states, as opposed to the federal government, hold the responsibility to establish and maintain juvenile courts. Therefore, these courts vary between states, and they even vary between counties, as states often charge local jurisdictions in managing juvenile justice.[11] Despite the wide variety of court management practices, several common experiences exist which require attention. First, a young person's contact with their juvenile justice system often begins when she or he is arrested by a police officer for a delinquent act. For example, an act committed by a young person which would not incriminate an adult, such as skipping school. At arrest, the officer has the choice to either warn and release the young offender or refer them to juvenile court.

If a young person is referred to a juvenile court, once the local court receives a referral, an intake officer reviews the facts of the case to determine whether the young person committed the delinquent act. In the interim, if the officer determines that the youth could commit additional offenses prior to court processing, the court can incarcerate that young person in a juvenile detention facility. If the facts prove decisively that the youth committed a criminal act, the court will then handle the case either informally or formally. Informally processed cases are often dismissed but may also entail informal probation which requires the young person to adhere to a set of conditions such as a mandatory curfew or victim restitution.[12]

In 2019, juvenile courts handled 46 percent of their cases informally.[13] In formal cases, the court holds an adjudicatory hearing at which the judge or jury determines whether the young person committed the criminal act.[14] If the court adjudicates the young person as delinquent, then it will give one of two dispositions: probation or confinement in a residential treatment facility. In the former case, probation, the judge will deliver a list of conditions which the adjudicated youth must meet for either an open-ended or specific amount of time under the surveillance of a probation officer.[15] Once the young person has satisfied the terms of probation, the judge will terminate the case. However, violations of probation conditions often lead the young person back to court.[16]

Why Reform Juvenile Probation?

As addressed above, probation — one of the two options available to youth — is the most common disposition in juvenile justice systems.[17] Too often it results in further system involvement for young people, even those who have never been found guilty of a crime. For example, as of 2014, 24,000 young people received a probation disposition for committing a status offense, which is an act that the law prohibits only for young people, such as truancy or possession of alcohol.[18] In its current form, juvenile probation reflects three of the most pervasive deficiencies in the juvenile justice system: it is inequitable, ineffective and inefficient.

Inequitable

As of 2017, youth of color comprised 55 percent of young people on probation, despite making up only 46 percent of the total youth population.[19] Furthermore, young people of color comprise 64 percent of youth confined in a residential treatment facility due to a technical violation (i.e. breaking a condition of probation rather than committing a new offense).[20] These racial inequities exist at every stage of the juvenile justice system: young people of color, especially black youth, experience more arrests, detainments, probation, incarceration and transfers to adult court than white youth.[21] At the same time, white youth are more likely to receive a diversion disposition than youth of color, indicating biases in determining whether to prosecute delinquent youth.[22]

Additionally, socioeconomic status plays a leading role in determining whether a youth is exposed to law enforcement. Low-income communities experience a higher police presence than moderate and upper-income communities.[23] An increased police presence can lead to higher rates of law-enforcement contact for youths.[24]

As noted previously, individual discretion holds great power in juvenile justice. Perhaps this is most true with probation officers, the linchpin of the probation system. These individuals observe and monitor young people, unilaterally decide whether the youth sufficiently adhere to probation requirements and possess the authority to cite violations of the contract and incite further court processing.[25] In other words, every decision the probation officer makes directly impacts the judicial outcomes for youth on probation. Unfortunately, despite the opportunity for bias to do immense harm to certain youths, little bias-awareness conversations around probation occur today.

A 2016 Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) survey of 1,000 probation personnel found that 61 percent of them seldom or never discussed "racial disparities in their treatment of probation youth with peers and supervisors" and that 64 percent seldom or never reviewed "data on racial and ethnic disparities."[26] In sum, approximately two-thirds of probation officers do not discuss the possibility of bias impacting their work. Probation officers have the ability to address the racial discrepancies in juvenile justice by treating youths of color more equitably. At this time, however, the juvenile justice system does not equally process youths of color compared to their white peers.

Ineffective

For many young people, particularly those who are at low-risk of reoffense, probation is ineffective at restoring them to their communities. When studying criminal justice, scholars often turn to recidivism rates — the rates at which previous offenders commit additional crimes — to gauge the effectiveness of solutions. Surprisingly, for those youths at low risk of reoffense, probation tends to increase recidivism rates. A 2014 study directed by the RECLAIM Ohio initiative found that low-risk youth placed on probation were more than 50 percent more likely to reoffend than those not placed on probation.[27]

Although designed to keep youth in their communities, juvenile probation contributes to increased system involvement because of its counterproductive reliance on deterrence, discipline and surveillance. This extra court involvement, however, fails to consider adolescent neurology. Laurence Steinberg, a leading expert on adolescence psychology, observes that mid-adolescence "is a time of high sensation-seeking but still developing self-regulation — a combination that inclines individuals toward risky behavior."[28] When faced with a risky decision, young people will give more attention to the benefits, rather than

risks, of that decision, particularly when friends encourage them to do so.[29] Moreover, scholars agree that the human brain does not completely mature until the age of 25 and, by that time, most juvenile offenders stop breaking the law.[30]

Additionally, juvenile probation does not conform with the emerging field of positive youth development, which focuses "on forging positive relationships; strengthening academic, soft and technical skills; cultivating trustworthy, safe spaces; and offering youth opportunities to succeed in meaningful ways."[31] Young people benefit from supportive, positive environments, but probation does not facilitate these environments. For example, a youth placed on probation must comply with a long list of conditions—sometimes over 30—while under strict surveillance by his or her probation officer.[32] This does not provide youth with incentives or rewards for positive behavior, but instead only threatens punishment for not meeting probation conditions.

Inefficient

The cost of probation often outweighs its benefits. Including personnel costs and funding for "programming, supplies, technology, transportation and administration,"[33] Juvenile probation costs more than two billion dollars across 50 states.[34] In order to alleviate state costs, courts often impose fines and fees on young people and their families.[35] These may come in the form of court expenses, probation supervision fees and the cost of GPS monitoring.[36] Ironically, these expenses designed to fund probation actually harm those paying them. A report issued by the Juvenile Law Center found that the imposition of fees for court processing burdens already financially stressed families, increases recidivism rates and exacerbates racial inequities within the system and in society at large.[37] For low-income families, the court fees may cost them multiple meals and heftier fees may prevent the young person's siblings from going to college.[38] Moreover, families who cannot pay face "criminal contempt, civil judgments that follow them into adulthood, probation violations, additional fees, incarceration, property liens and ineligibility for expungement."[39] In sum, the cost of juvenile probation tends to fall more heavily on underprivileged families, further aggravating racial and economic inequities and entrenching young people and their families in poverty and the cycle of crime.

The Effect of Juvenile Probation on Young People

As explained above, probation disrupts the family routine and imposes both financial and emotional stress on already struggling families. A report by Afterschool Alliance notes that nine out of 10 youth involved in the juvenile justice system experienced at least one form of trauma — such as physical violence, sexual assault or death of a loved one — prior to their offense.[40]

Additionally, probation hinders young peoples' educational attainment and future career success. A research study conducted by the Council of State Governments Justice Center found that, though mandatory school attendance is often a probation condition, youth on probation "had more school absences during their first year of supervision than prior to being placed on probation."[41] One possible explanation for this disparity could be the social stigma often tied to probation which may discourage those youths from attending school.[42] These academic hindrances, combined with both the financial and familial burdens imposed by probation and the stress of fulfilling all probation conditions, can prevent youth from graduating and from building a stable career.[43]

Looking Ahead

Within the juvenile justice system, which seeks to accept challenged youth and return fully-functioning, restored and contributing members of society, probation acts as the limiting step. Probation often holds youth back from greater success and counteracts the other functions of the juvenile justice programs. It often leads to further, unnecessary involvement in the system, including confinement, and it perpetuates racial inequities within the system, emphasizing punitive deterrence and surveillance rather than positive youth development. Finally, probation costs more, both financially and emotionally, than other community-based alternatives.[44]

The restorative aims of the juvenile justice system and probation too often clash with one another. However, an ever-growing body of youth development research advocates for a complete divorce between low-risk youth and juvenile probation, and a significant increase in the number of cases diverted away from the system entirely. An effective shift to diversion programming for low-risk youth requires the contributions of both the juvenile justice system as well as essential civil society institutions such as secular and faith-based nonprofits, houses of worship, and schools.

FRAME

When his father suddenly left and his mother scrambled to find work, Dan, only a sophomore in high school, developed an anxiety disorder. With tight finances and an exhausted mother, Dan rarely ate a complete and healthy meal. Some of his friends shared similar experiences and often turned to drugs to escape their dark and painful realities. Dan thought that marijuana could deliver a brief break from reality and help him forget that his father had left him, but as he started using, he found himself more anxious when he was not using the drug. One day, in an attempt to stay ahead of his feelings, he brought some to school. Some of his classmates snitched on him, and officers took his backpack.

On top of family tragedy, financial strain and malnutrition, Dan experienced a costly, stressful and time-consuming court process. Formal court processing cost him and his mother 250 dollars in administrative fees, and it interrupted his schooling so much that the school required him to take extensive summer schooling to catch up on his missed classes. In the dispositional hearing, the juvenile judge sentenced Dan to formal probation, emphasizing that a second violation could send Dan to a detention center. To seal this threat, the probation agency attached a GPS monitor to Dan's ankle.

Dan now suffers from chronic and acute anxiety. His ankle monitor constantly reminds him that his only known escape, marijuana, might send him to a facility. He attends drug counseling and personal counseling, but only because the court mandates it as a part of his probation contract. Of course, he does not want to go to a detention center.

Dan arrived in the courtroom because of decisions he made, but these decisions felt like the natural and safe way to escape a truly dark situation. Dan, a young student with no prior criminal history, suddenly found himself wearing the mark of criminality and shuffled between offices, courtrooms and threats. Although this is a fictional account, Dan's story is very real. It illustrates the difficult reality many youths face when they encounter the criminal justice system. For many young people, court processing results from criminal actions they made in response to the pain they are experiencing.

Two Kinds of Justice

In order to consider how the criminal justice system can better implement justice that restores youth, it is helpful to look at a biblical framework for justice. In Exodus chapters 20 through 23, God establishes a legal code for the Israelites. This system of justice delivers exact, detailed rules of law which apply to the various areas of Israelite life, including relations between parents and children, young men and young women, livestock and people, and people and property.[1] The laws leave no room for error and carry strict, unforgiving punishments. For example, "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."[2] As well as the classic *lex talionis*: "[when] there is harm, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, blow for blow."[3] Though this legal system today may seem extreme and mechanical, God taught Israel the weighty value of life and the sinfulness of harming it.

The legal code found in Exodus 20-23 safeguards life through a system of retributive justice, a form of recompense which focuses on requiring offenders to immediately answer for their crimes. This form of restitution seeks justice through negative means: if a young man harmed a family, then retributive justice would administer equal harm to the young man. Following Exodus — and throughout the Bible — God reveals not only the negative cost of what this justice requires, but also a more

holistic justice: restorative justice, which properly includes mercy and invites offenders into a process which restores them to the community.

On the whole, the Bible emphasizes a positive justice which both restores those accused and also holds them accountable. Jesus summarized justice with the positive command of loving God and loving neighbor. He lived out this restorative approach by walking with the sinners, lawbreakers and outcasts of his day.[4] He viewed them as victims of themselves, as opposed objects of punishment, and sought to liberate them from their sinful nature.[5] At the same time, restorative justice charges people to seek out those they wronged and make amends: "First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift [to God]."[6]

Proactive and constructive rather than reactionary and punitive, restorative justice affirms that all people possess the *imago dei*, that the image of God deserves restoration, and that restoration only comes about through healthy relationships.

Governments ought to implement policies that reflect the principles of restorative justice because this justice alone preserves and prospers people and their communities. According to the Center for Public Justice's Guideline on Government, governments exist to preserve the fundamental rights and integrity of those under their care while providing a framework for community development.[7] Part of governmental responsibility mandates protecting the lives, property and peace of law-abiding citizens from those who transgress the law, but this protection need not be unjust.[8]

Restorative justice shines brightest when applied to those who break the law and who, from a complex of causes, decide to harm others. Restorative justice requires people to rightfully pay for their crimes, but also receive acceptance from the community on the other side of their penance. The ultimate objective of restorative justice is for offenders to feel remorse for their actions, initiate reconciliation with the victim and remain in their communities as active and beloved members of society.[9] In other words, restorative justice provides one way for offenders to become neighbors.

If the government exists to preserve and prosper the people under its care, then it cannot allow offenders to remain offenders. It must tap into the principles of restorative justice in order to repair the breach between those who broke the law and the rest of their communities. It must restore them as neighbors.

A central pillar of the government's work with criminal justice is the juvenile justice system. Working with children, this system must function out of restorative justice. It ought to exist to empower young people with the hope of a stable, full and meaningful life. In fact, restorative justice pertains particularly to youth both because they have not fully matured and because, compared to adults, they have immense potential for change.[10] Unfortunately, the most common disposition of the system, probation, fails to restore young people to their communities. The juvenile justice system does not encourage positive youth development — the financial costs are simply too high, it pushes youths deeper into the system and it disproportionately burdens low-income communities, especially low-income communities of color.[11] Probation requires immediate attention and reform which equitably and effectively reduces recidivism and equips young people with necessary life skills. Fortunately, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention recommends measuring the success of justice initiatives by "how much repair was done rather than by how much punishment was inflicted."[12] One method of creating a successful juvenile justice system grounded in repair involves pre-trial diversion.

What is Diversion?

Juvenile diversion programs redirect young people away from the juvenile justice system.[13] They allow youth and their families to avoid the stress, expenses and long-term consequences of formal court processing, formal probation and incarceration.[14] In a diversion program, a young person stays in the community, receives specialized support and does not experience the stigma of being formally involved in the system.[15] Diversion usually takes

place pre-trial, but it may occur post-trial as well.[16] Pre-trial diversion can happen prior to arrest — such as when school officials decide not to involve the police; at the prosecutorial level — as a post-arrest decision made by the prosecutor; or at a juvenile court intake — when the court intake officer may decide that formal processing is not needed.[17]

Pre-trial diversion encompasses a variety of actions and programs ranging from simple a warn-and-release by a school official to an individualized service plan established by a court. In many cases, less is more. For young people with first-time misdemeanor offenses, police officers, school officials, prosecutors or court intake officers need only to verbally admonish them.[18] Where authority figures need to apply more intervention, officers may utilize short-term, light-touch diversion which could entail an "apology letter, essay, workshop, or low-intensity diversion program."[19] A restorative justice model of diversion involves the whole community in victim-offender mediation where the neighborhood holds an informal hearing with both the offender and victim and arrives at a resolution together.[20] The most intensive form of division involves the individualized service plan which may include "individual or family counseling, cognitive-behavioral training, mentor or advocate program, academic tutoring, wraparound services, [and] sex offense counseling."[21] Even this most intense program carries a smaller burden than probation.

Young people, as all people do, deserve fair and equitable treatment in the justice system. All people possess the *Imago Dei* and therefore deserve respect and dignity. When humans do not recognize or cherish God's image, categorizing people into outgroups or failing to hope for the best for others, societies crumble. Mutual respect and recognition of individual dignity acts as the glue for any community, and that extends to young people as well. Moreover, young people — despite the cliché — are the future. They will develop into adults whether they receive proper care and attention or not. Whether the next generation matures into contributing members of society or into a generation of strife depends in large part on the previous generation.

Who Should be Diverted?

For all youth, diversion provides a more equitable, effective and efficient option than probation, except for those who are "alleged to have committed a serious violent felony, have a history of serious and/or chronic offending or have been assessed as high risk of rearrest."[22] The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) recommends that for first-time offenses, chronic offenses that do not pose a substantial threat to public safety, and first-time nonviolent felony offenses, youth should always be diverted.[23] On the other hand, youth must be formally processed if they have committed a serious violent felony offense with premeditation.[24] For unclear cases, factors such as premeditation, the youth's criminal record, his/her social, educational and family background, and whether he/she has completed a diversion program in the past should determine diversion eligibility.[25]

Why is Diversion Preferable to Formal Probation?

Compared to formal probation, pre-trial diversion provides better outcomes for young people because it caters to the specific needs and strengths of the young people and focuses on community development.[26] The different intensity levels and the different avenues of diversion account for the different circumstances, needs and capabilities of the youths involved. Diversion focuses on young peoples' needs and capabilities — rather than their guilt — and addresses the causes of delinquency from within rather than from without.[27] Rather than only responding to the youth's external behaviors, diversion addresses the root causes behavior, such as family condition, history of abuse and emotional challenges.

Pre-trial diversion keeps young people in community and, more importantly, it develops communities alongside the young people. In this way, diversion directly addresses the problems of probation. Diversion combats inequity, ineffectiveness and inefficiency by reallocating federal and state funds away from increasing police presence in low-income or minority communities.[28] These released funds can go towards effective programs that address the specific needs and

capacities of young people and families in a way that conforms with positive youth development.[29]

Pre-trial diversion provides a nuanced, multifaceted response to restoring youth and predictably lowers recidivism rates.[30] A 2013 meta-analysis published by Criminal Justice and Behavior compared the recidivism rates of about 14,600 diverted youth to the rates of about 18,800 youth who endured formal court proceedings. The study found that, in "60 of the 73 programs, the recidivism rate of diverted youth was lower than that of youth processed by the traditional justice system."[31] Diversion programs keep young people in their communities and out of detention centers.

Why Should Communities Implement Diversion Programs?

Diversion delivers restorative justice. It engages the community, pushing it to both discipline and embrace youth. It focuses on relationships empowering youth, family and victims to determine the course of restitution and reconciliation.[32] Ultimately, through diversion the community honors God's image in young offenders by exerting time, money and energy in equipping them to love their neighbors.

Multiple-Actor Approach

The diversion solution will succeed only if governments partner with civil society organizations in order to proceed in an evidence-based, family-centered and equitable manner. Each civil society entity has a specific role in restoring young people to society. The federal government possesses the resources necessary to bolster diversion programs, but only the local schools, police departments and community members will understand the environment diverted youth grew up in. It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes a village to divert one.

The Role of Government

The Center for Public Justice defines the purpose of government as establishing and sustaining a system of community that safeguards the fundamental rights of all inhabitants, that allows for a wide variety of human activities, and that responds to the long-term interests of its residents.[33] In other words, it actively develops a political, social, and economic framework for civil prosperity. Thinking of government only as an arbiter for human disputes or only as a taxing entity fails to acknowledge the essential role it plays in preserving order among humans so that they can live freely.

For example, when a conflict proves intractable, people can bring a suit to a court. The court delivers the final sentence and resolves the conflict peacefully. This preserves the social order, and people can live with the assurance that other people will not take the law into their own hands. The government looks ahead and makes policies, establishing societal habits which make human freedom and the pursuit of happiness possible.

Federal Government

On the federal level, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) regulates state administration of juvenile justice by adding conditions to federal funding, which appear under Title II of the law.[34] The JJDPA prioritizes delinquency prevention — rather than punishment — and diversion away from the system over institutionalization. Moreover, it attaches a racial equity condition on state applications for JJDPA funds, thereby addressing one of the greatest problems in the system. In order for a state plan to receive approval for federal funding under Title II of the JJDPA, the state must "implement policy, practice, and system improvement strategies at the state, territorial, local, and tribal levels, as applicable, to identify and reduce racial and ethnic disparities among youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, without establishing or requiring numerical standards or quotas."[35]

The JJDPA provides a promising framework for diversion programs. Nevertheless, it lacks emphasis on partnerships between state and civil society organizations.[36] Such coalitions aid in diversion efforts because they combine state money and legitimacy with the empirical wealth and community knowledge of civil experts. In the next amendment of the JJDPA, Congress should add a condition to state plans requiring the development of partnerships with civil society institutions.

State Governments

State governments, particularly state legislatures, should focus on innovative policies that encourage diversion from formal court processing. For example, the Pennsylvania General Assembly is currently processing the bipartisan Juvenile Justice Policy Act (JJPA), which will limit residential confinement of youth and "expand and standardize diversion practices."[37] The standardization of diversion practices is an essential first step in expanding the effectiveness of diversion programs.[38] After all, diversion programs cannot be successfully adopted if no guidelines exist to clarify who qualifies for diversion and in what circumstances.[39]

Once states standardize their diversion programs, they can expand and enforce it by establishing diversion quotas. These quotas would compel state courts to divert a certain proportion of young people from its caseload. According to AECF calculations, that quota should equal 60 percent of all juvenile cases.[40] This calculation arises from the proportion of youths referred to court for a first-time, nonviolent crime or a repeat offense which did not pose a serious threat to society.[41] The AECF found that diversion lowered the recidivism rates of these young people whereas formal probation raised them.[42] This policy would not only protect low-risk youth from the negative impacts of formal probation, but also enable the probation agency to focus its efforts where it produced positive effects: high-risk youth with repeated offenses.[43]

A financial disincentive to formally processing youth and a financial incentive for diverting youth would help states reach their diversion quotas. For example, the Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives (RECLAIM) Ohio program gave each county in Ohio a fixed budget allocation for their juvenile justice system. For each youth sent into confinement, the county had to reimburse the state for the cost of confinement. The less a county spent on confinement, the more money it could use on other programs, like diversion.[44] This program decreased youth confinement in Ohio by 36 percent within 10 years.[45] As more young people participated in RECLAIM Ohio diversion programs, recidivism rates decreased for low- and moderate-risk youth. The program also saved a substantial amount of taxpayer money.[46] States should apply the same principle to formal probation in order to decrease probation caseloads, decrease recidivism rates and decrease taxpayer spending.

Like the federal government, state governments must craft policies which allow for meaningful partnerships with civil society organizations at the local level. The Credible Messenger program in New York City is an example. This program contracts with 19 community organizations which hire and train credible messengers — someone with personal experience with the justice system. These messengers serve as mentors for youth on probation. Typically, they work with youth for six months and help them think about how they could turn their lives around.[47] Other governments have adopted a similar approach successfully; local governments in Richmond, California used the credible messenger method to reduce gun violence, for example. The United Kingdom ran a similar program and found that for every pound invested, their program produced five pounds in public benefits.[48] The credible messenger system gives state governments a successful diversion model which they can encourage localities to use. More states ought to implement these programs.

State and local governments must also partner with schools in order to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Schools serve as the crucible for adolescent development: the classes, lunches, hangouts, relationships, extracurriculars, school trips and traditions schools provide for students contribute greatly to positive youth development.[49] Formal probation dramatically interrupts a student's schooling and diminishes the benefits students gain from their education by placing a social stigma on probated students.

In 2014, the Philadelphia, PA police department began to partner with Philadelphia schools through the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program.[50] This program prohibited the arrest of youth who committed a first-time misdemeanor offense at school. If the youth requested social services, then a social worker

would connect him or her with community-based services. Other than that, no strings were attached. Philadelphia found that, compared to students who were arrested, this program reduced the number of suspensions students received after the offense and placed students on a more positive life trajectory. Most importantly, it kept the students in the school environment where they could continue to receive support from teachers and friends.[51] Other state and local governments should establish similar policies to keep youth in school, uninterrupted.

The Role of Civil Society

The solution of diversion will only succeed if civil society organizations, such as nonprofits and houses of worship, serve as mediators between the government and the people. These organizations hold the unique role of partnering with the government in order to channel funding and programming into the community in effective ways. They must collaborate with federal and local governments by fully understanding the purpose of diversion programs, advocating for changes and continuing to research ways to improve diversion.

Faith-Based and Secular Nonprofits

Across the country, nonprofits — both secular and faith-based — advocate for more just justice systems. Through grassroots movements, partnership building and data-driven scholarship, these organizations serve their communities day by day.

For example, the Community Connections for Youth (CCFY) in South Bronx, New York, seeks to provide community-based alternatives to juvenile incarceration with a three-pronged approach.[52] First, it consults directly with juvenile justice agencies to identify ways to reduce reliance on the system in order to avoid the negative effects of the system on young people. Second, it works directly with the community to organize coalitions which effectively engage with system-involved youth. Third, it forms a research-based partnership between the government and the community to divert youth from formal court processing.[53] This model of addressing the government, working with the community and bringing them together in unified action must be implemented for diversion programs to successfully aid youth.

Because nonprofit institutions work directly with and in the community, they understand the juvenile justice system's impact on the community better than the government and must use that knowledge to inform government policies. They can do this by administering pilot programs to experiment with different types of diversion programs, measuring and tracking the results and sharing the results with the government and community coalitions. For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation started a pilot project 25 years ago called Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), which has formed a network of juvenile justice practitioners who collaborate in finding effective and equitable alternatives to juvenile confinement, such as pre-trial diversion.[54]

Houses of Worship

Houses of worship provide sacred places where young people can form meaningful connections with each other and learn the principles of restorative justice and remediation. It is in these faith-filled places where young people, especially those involved in the court system, experience deep, systematic change in their hearts and experience the faith community. Therefore, houses of worship should partner with nonprofit organizations and governments in order to learn the most effective ways to care for diverted youth and implement programs accordingly. Ideally, houses of worship, other civil society organizations and governments will collaborate to serve young people. Both churches and government are called to care for human beings, and each entity contributes something which the other cannot. Houses of worship bring faith, hope and love while governments bring money, infrastructure and political legitimacy.

Houses of worship could develop a government-endorsed, parent-youth care system where adult members are matched to diversion-involved youth and required to connect with them on a weekly basis. After all, relationship building, recreation, community service, cross-generational connections, civic engagement and role-modeling are key ele-

ments of positive youth development.[55] Government certification of church-led youth programs could encourage the participation of justice-involved youth who would not otherwise participate, and it could grant more formality to the programs, assuring parents of justice-involved youth that their young ones are interacting with qualified personnel. Government certification would also unify the standard of care across states, ensuring that all programs meet certain minimal requirements while still focusing on the local, community nature necessary for these programs to function.

Conclusion: An Alternative Path

Young people bear the image of God, and every community holds a responsibility to cherish them when they thrive and to restore them when they fall. In the realm of juvenile justice, such restoration manifests itself in diversion programs that, instead of belittling youth for their shortcomings, empower them to take responsibility for their actions and experience the joy of living well with others. However, diversion requires active and unified commitment from governments and civil society organizations. Governments hold the responsibility of forming a framework for juvenile justice which ensures that young people who violated the law receive constructive feedback. Moreover, governments cannot do this without forming partnerships with civil society organizations which bear the responsibility of mediating between the government and the community.

Sophomore Dan, whose story was told earlier, did not benefit from formal probation. It merely intensified his cycle of drug abuse. The added anxiety of the GPS monitor bolstered his desire for his only known escape, marijuana. His strong desires only intensified his anxiety because he remembered the judge's threat of incarceration. At some point, he would break.

Imagine, however, if the juvenile judge had diverted Dan's case to a substance abuse recovery program. Dan would have received counseling, support and solidarity with others who understood his attachment to drugs. Additionally, Dan's record would have remained clear, allowing him to apply for jobs and enjoy life like his peers. Perhaps Dan would commit to becoming sober. Then, perhaps he would realize that his sobriety better allows him to concentrate on schoolwork. Though not always fun, consistently finishing his work might render Dan the satisfaction of a good habit. Schoolwork could also interest Dan in his future career. With these two things, good habits and good career hopes, Dan would be well on his way to becoming a self-sufficient leader in society.

Of course, this would only be half of the picture. The diversion process would cement in Dan's mind the truth that he needs community. If a judge had not considered diversion for Dan, he may not have had the same opportunities to change. No government program can force a change of heart, but it can facilitate the environment. However, for Dan, and for many real young people, a judge, a police officer, or a teacher did take a moment to consider diversion, and that decision provided that young person with the chance to change. Restorative justice calls for this opportunity, we should too.

ENGAGE

Cumberland County, PA spans 555 square miles in south-central Pennsylvania and includes both urban and rural areas.[1] It has a sizable population of 247,848, classifying it as a third-class Pennsylvanian county.[2] Between 2009 and 2015, recidivism rates for youth involved in the county's probation agency decreased overall.[3] For example, in 2009, 43 percent of youth discharged from probation were later rearrested; in 2015, only 17 percent faced rearrest.[4] These exceptional statistics result from a number of important factors, but one central reason arose from the establishment of the Cumberland County Youth Aid Panel diversion program in 2003.[5] This panel serves as a powerful example to the rest of Pennsylvania, and the nation, of how diversion can successfully change lives for the better.

At the Hampden Township Police Department in Cumberland County, three volunteers from the community sat across the table from a young high-schooler and his family. The young man's school

referred him to this Youth Aid Panel (YAP) in response to his in-school drug possession.[6] To begin, the panelists introduced themselves and stated the purpose of YAP and the discussion: namely, to allow the young man an opportunity to avoid the rigors and stress of traditional court processing. In other words, to provide a chance to start again. Whereas traditional court processing frequently endures for more than six months, the YAP would take, at most, half that time to complete.[7]

After communicating this timeline, the panelists conversed with the young man and his family for 30 minutes in order to grant him the opportunity to present his side of the story as well as to gain insight into his life: his strengths, weaknesses, aspirations and frustrations. The YAP panel sought to gain a fuller picture of the young man, including the decisions and circumstances that brought him into their meeting room. As part of his testimonial, the young man described the difficulties of COVID-19 — schooling and the resulting deflation of his academic motivations.[8] After the conversation, the young man and his family stepped outside while the volunteers developed a YAP contract tailored specifically to the information they received from the preceding conversation.

The young man and his family returned, and the panelists explained the contract to them, which included provisions such as mowing lawns and writing a letter of apology to his parents. If the young man completed the contract by their next meeting, his record would be expunged.[9] While no record of the offense would persist, the benefits provided to the community, and to the young man, would remain into perpetuity.

What is YAP and who is eligible?

For 17 years, Lisa Harrison has directed the youth diversion effort in Cumberland County.[10] In a Zoom interview, Harrison explained Cumberland County's primary youth diversion option, the Youth Aid Panel. Prior to her work with youth diversion, Harrison completed the year-long Pennsylvania Management Internship Program, in which she rotated between the Department of Education, the Department of Revenue, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Corrections, doing research on various topics.[11] Following completion of the program, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections hired her as the Information Coordinator at the Planning, Research and Statistics Department.[12] In this role Harrison began working with YAP.

Lisa described the YAP as an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system," which helps young people "avoid appearing before a judge."[13] Due to its community-facing nature, YAP requires active community engagement and involvement, including "collaboration between community members, the police, juvenile court probation, the district attorney's office, the public defender's office, and other community agencies," such as "drug and alcohol provider [and] counseling services."[14] The panel provides powerful opportunities for youth caught up in the system and requires a community dedicated to restoration and collective betterment.

The Community Youth Aid Panel acts as the primary juvenile diversion program in Cumberland County.[15] Only first-time offending youth who admit their guilt can receive approval from the Magisterial District Judge or the Juvenile Probation Office for entering YAP.[16] Youth may be referred to YAP via the police, the probation agency, the District Attorney's office, a private attorney or a judge.[17] From start to finish, a YAP case typically lasts three months, ending in expungement.[18] According to Harrison, during expungement, "a court order is sent up to the judge to be signed, and … it expunges their record and … orders anyone who came in contact with that case to erase it from their records."[19] A court order is also sent to the juvenile offender database to erase the case — including fingerprints — from the database.[20]

The YAP Process

Once the District Judge or the Juvenile Probation Office approves YAP eligibility, the young offender and his or her family will meet with a volunteer YAP panel like the one described above. Volunteer panelists go through five weeks of training — a total of 15 hours — before a juvenile judge swears

them into duty.[21] Sixty-five volunteers currently serve in Cumberland County, each of whom volunteers about once a month.[22] The volunteer panelists receive minimal background information on the young offender, but they do receive his or her citation to probation record and a personal inventory form which details the young person's hobbies, habits and hopes among other information.[23]

During the panel, the volunteers converse with the young person and family in order to understand, from the youth's perspective, the circumstances surrounding and leading to the incident. The volunteers also seek to understand whether the young person understands the impact of the offense. For example, they may ask a young person who vandalized: "How would you have felt if it was your windshield that was broken?"[24] Once the panelists have a clear understanding of what happened, they will ask the youth and family to step outside.

The volunteers then formulate a contract, which includes a combination of community service, random acts of kindness and writing assignments — such as letters of apology — restitution payments, career planning and hands-on projects. What the panelists include in the contract depends upon the education and income of the offender, the career aspirations of the young person, how he or she best learns and any family limitations. For example, if a young person's family only has one car, then the panelists will not include long-distance community service on the contract.[25] Additionally, YAP allows the victims of offenses to give input on contracts.[26]

After preparing the contract, the panelists invite the young person and their family back into the room and review the document with them. If all parties agree, then they sign the contract. At the end of three months, they will return to the panel and confirm that the young person completed the contract. If he or she did, then expungement ensues. However, if, at any point within the three-month period, the youth commits another offense or if the youth fails to complete the contract, then she or he will transfer to traditional court processing.[27]

Strengths of the YAP Program

Compared to the alternative of traditional processing, YAP shows young people mercy while still holding them accountable for their actions. Since the volunteers develop a personalized contract, the requirements often include victim restitution and apology, which serves to provide reconciliation between the various parties. Additionally, the YAP process costs less to manage than traditional court processing: misdemeanor and higher charges cost the guilty party 50 dollars for admission in addition to any restitution included in the contract.[28] YAP volunteers understand the financial situation of the offender and their family and may provide alternatives, such as community service, for the admission fee and any restitution payments.[29]

YAP provides a low stress, discussion-based, and family-oriented environment for restitution. Through YAP, young people do not experience the anxieties which accompany questioning by a juvenile judge. Instead, they talk with community members trained to engage with youth in a way that affirms instead of degrades them.[30] Additionally, YAP encourages youths to consider the root causes of their misbehavior and pushes them towards accomplishing their goals.[31]

In the interview, Harrison recounted the ability of one volunteer, a retired dentist, to connect with youth: "He had a cane, and he was older looking and could have easily be disregarded … but he had an [amazingly] uncanny ability to connect with these kids and get their attention … Sometimes these kids come to these panel meeting[s] and have [a poor] attitude, but once they see that a total stranger is actually listening to them … they're amazed that an adult is listening to them."[32] Cross-generational feedback drives part of the YAP core value and may provide the very thing that gives the young person enough hope to change.

At the close of the interview, Harrison proudly read an impressive list of YAP accomplishments:

"Since 2003, we have had over 4,000 successful cases, juveniles have completed over 60,000 hours of community service, we have collected over $69,804.89 in restitution, [and our volunteers] have volunteered for almost 31,000 hours."[33] The YAP program not only diverts young people from traditional court processing, but also fosters community connections and reconciliation, holistically addressing the problem of juvenile delinquency.

Nonprofit: Harrisburg Regional Chamber & Capital Region Economic Development Corporation (CREDC)

While some juvenile justice workers like Lisa Harrison devote themselves to developing more just solutions within the government and courts, others like Ryan Keith effect lasting change through nonprofit organizations. In an interview, Keith described himself as "the public policy pastor" at Westshore Free Evangelical Church in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. He then scrupulously recounted his experience in policy and community development.[34]

He began his policy pastoring at the Harrisburg Regional Chamber & Capital Region Economic Development Corporation where for five years he participated in job creation activities, entrepreneurial startup aid and community development in the struggling areas of central PA.[35] Then, from 2004 to 2018, Ryan oversaw Forgotten Voices, a ministry which he started in Zimbabwe, Africa, that empowers local churches to address the orphan crisis.[36] He brought these community development skills back to central Pennsylvania by launching a foster care initiative at Westshore Free Evangelical Church.[37] Though he never dealt with juvenile justice head-on, Keith's work in foster care, community development and addressing systematic social problems is closely related to juvenile justice.

CREDC promotes economic development in Pennsylvania, specifically in Cumberland, Dauphin and Perry counties.[38] The organization has four major initiatives: "retaining existing businesses and workforce, supporting business growth and expansion efforts, attracting new and relocating businesses, and fostering business creation and innovation."[39] Keith directed these initiatives in struggling neighborhoods like Allison Hill in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, addressing systemic poverty and crime with economic revitalization.[40] In the interview, Keith pointed out that systemic adversity — including inner-city poverty — holds a substantial nexus to family fragility, and, consequently, youth entrenchment in the juvenile justice system.[41]

Through investment in inner-city income growth and tax bases through economic tools like low-interest rate loan and grant programs, CREDC addresses a major cause of juvenile delinquency, namely family fragility.[42] If Allison Hill families acquired and learned to maintain a stable income in a stable economy, they would have more time, energy and money to love on their children, channeling their children's energy into beneficial activities, and subsequently juvenile delinquency would plummet.

Rock City After-School Youth Enrichment Program

The Allison Hill neighborhood in Harrisburg, PA., struggles to prosper. Of its 3,325 residents, over 50 percent never finished high school, and the median household income rests at only $37,924, nearly $30,000 less than the national median.[43] According to the Neighborhood Scout, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania also scores poorly on the crime index, falling into the bottom quadrant of safety in U.S. cities with a violent crime rate of 8.4 per 1,000 residents.[44] All told, Allison Hill seems like a town ripe for crime beginning at a young age.

Reverend Joshua Robertson, born and raised in Allison Hill, personally experienced the impact drug abuse and familial neglect can have on a community. Rev. Robertson works to display God's restorative grace to his Allison Hill community through his Rock City After-School Enrichment Program.[45] Based out of the Rock Church, Robertson provides physical, social and academic support to the young people of Allison Hill.

During an interview, he detailed a typical afternoon for his students: From 3-3:30 p.m., he feeds the kids; then, for the next hour they have academic time which includes tutoring, homework, and more. If any students need addition-

al assistance academically, then their academic time extends until 5 p.m. Finally, from 5 p.m. to either 6 or 7 p.m., the kids have time to play games, exercise and explore their hobbies or personal interests.[46] For example, the Rock Church brings a karate instructor on Wednesdays and Thursdays for students interested in martial arts.[47]

Additionally, Reverend Robertson explained that the learning program does much more than simply feeding and tutoring the kids. He emphasized that the after-school care serves a pivotal parenting role in the lives of these children.[48] "Our children are experiencing a world without parents," he said.[49] "Many children in Allison Hill do not receive parenting at home; their parents are often too busy or too high on drugs to parent properly."[50] This lack of parenting and poor role modeling leads to adolescent misbehavior.

Keith, who led the foster care initiative at Westshore Evangelical Church, would agree that parenting plays a pivotal role in whether a child will grow up into a contributing member of society or will cyclically enter the criminal justice system. "Fragility in family, I think," Keith said, "is a root issue in justice, foster care, community development, [and] economic thriving. Fatherlessness is the root of a poorly watered tree…it's a root issue."[51] By providing adult-child mentorship, Reverend Robertson's learning program addresses a root issue in the juvenile justice crisis.

During the interview, Rev. Robertson also emphasized that while punishment is necessary, it is even more necessary to stimulate youths towards accomplishing their hopes and dreams. He said, "Resistance is the lowest form of discipline. Although we need to resist, right, but there's nothing like chasing a dream and starving distractions."[52] It might be easier to simply threaten a child for an offense, to quickly put a camera on him, or even to desperately confine him, but — in the long run — expending consistent time, energy and money in the holistic development of young people is the only way towards a prosperous society. Keith rightly said that, "We need to have a longitudinal perspective."[53] Lasting solutions take lasting commitment.

Juvenile diversion efforts have two main things to learn from Reverend Robertson's learning program: First, any program designed to correct youth misbehavior must do so in the context of a holistic relationship. In the context of youth diversion, holistic must mean that program employees and volunteers must vest themselves in as many parts of the young people's lives as is reasonable.

This involvement develops a bond between the diversion agents and the young people, a bond which can sustain positive discipline and development. Second, diversion agencies must focus both themselves and the young people on positive, long-term goals. Diversion agencies must not myopically focus on fixing certain behaviors. Instead, they must see their work as sowing human potential into society. Moreover, they must fix the eyes of the young people they work with on valuable goals and attainable aspirations.

The Power of Community

"It takes a village to empower. It takes a community to help someone explore their potential," said Reverend Robertson.[54] Positive youth development suggests that a young person's relationships directly drive their trajectory towards or away from criminality.[55] The rules and surveillance placed on court-involved youth, abstracted from good, dynamic relationships, only entrench habits of misbehavior. God created humans to live in community, and God created the mature to lead the young, not with punishment as the primary means of leadership, but with gracious love.

Pastor Joshua said: "Rules without relationship equal rebellion… Before God gives the Ten Commandments, he says, 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' Before the rules, he says, 'Think about who I am to you, in relationship with you.' Without that relationship piece, then the rule just becomes a rule, and you'll rebel against a rule."[56]

Any success in juvenile justice depends on positive relationship building at the heart of the program. Humans inherit the wisdom of life through

relationships. Only in the context of relationships do young people learn how to neglect and hurt others, and only in this context can they learn to love and keep peace with each other. Relationships stand as the crux of the juvenile probation problem, and for a diversion program to succeed, it must use strong, positive relationships to uplift youth.

How can we reform juvenile probation so that it restores youth in a relational and long-lasting way? It is difficult to recommend a single, comprehensive, one-size-fits all policy. One thing is certain, though: In order to even begin loving the youth in our communities, we must know the beauty of God and must see that beauty in every human being. This existential knowledge will serve as the fuel for catalyzing and sustaining necessary reforms.

We must also push for cross-community connections so that we can collaborate on identifying ways to improve the way youth are treated in the juvenile justice systems specific to our communities, getting to the root of the problems, and finding long-term solutions.

For example, the Cumberland County Probation Agency, CREDC, and The Rock Church do not have official ties, even though the work that they do manifests an ineluctable solidarity in bringing restorative justice to young people. Imagine federal or state governments passed public policies that officialized this unspoken bond and incentivized sharing of resources, responsibilities and experience among a vast array of government and community organizations. Such a network could only push the juvenile justice initiative further faster. Another way of pushing forward juvenile justice is simply volunteering in local diversion efforts. Here in Cumberland County, I have the option of volunteering on the Youth Aid Panel. Perhaps there is a similar opportunity for you.

Although the weight of the juvenile justice crisis can feel crushing at times, I have found a helpful way to think about it, by imagining what a just society would look like. As discussed, relationships and life dreams are the central things that can pull young people out of the justice system, and similarly relationships and life dreams can be powerful tools for pulling bystanders like you and I into the fight for justice.

Perhaps you will meet and befriend a Dan who can personally relate to the challenges of being placed on formal probation amidst family fragility. Perhaps you will begin to imagine a community where the justice system consists of people whose loving care and discipline transform the lives of youth offenders. This vision is restorative justice — the hope of a new life.

Access to Culturally Compentent Child Care Services for Refugee Families in Clarkston, Georgia

By Rachel Smith and Dr. Piljoo Kang

DISCOVER

Gami, a young mother of two children stands at the school bus stop. Her three-month-old daughter clings to her shoulders, tied to Gami's back, as they wait for her seven-year-old son to come home from school. Although they have little economic means, Gami and her husband Ishan work hard to provide a good life for their children. When her son steps off the bus, Gami rushes the three of them back to their small apartment and cooks up a quick meal while awaiting their neighbor.

Fortunately for Gami, her neighbor Rebecca watches her children for a few hours between the time she leaves for work and Ishan arrives home from his shift at the chicken processing company located in the neighboring town. Unfortunately, today Rebecca is running late, and Gami arrives at work 30 minutes late to her shift — a small error which could all too easily cost Gami her job and the precarious economic security of her family.

Unlike many other American families who work

odd hours with young children, Gami and Ishan recently immigrated to the United States from India as refugees. Although fictional, their story represents a challenge well-known to many refugee families struggling to acclimate to their new country: the difficulty of finding quality, affordable child care. In the story above, Gami's difficulty stems primarily from needing her neighbor to watch her children for a brief period while both she and Ishan are away from home. For families without sure child care, holding down jobs and managing children can be difficult. The challenge of child care grows for immigrant populations who may lack familiarity with English and who might lack the social capital native families have in relatives or friends.

This report will evaluate the experience of refugee families in the United States with relation to child care, and it will expose and address the barriers between these vulnerable families and affordable, accessible and high-quality child care.

The Refugee Population in the United States

Defined by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) as "any person who is outside her or her country of nationality or habitual residence and is unwilling to return or seek the protection of that country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," refugees by definition emigrate under immensely challenging circumstances.[1] Within this report, the term 'refugee' refers to those individuals who have resettled in the United States and fall under the ACF definition.

Within the past 50 years, over three million refugees journeyed to the United States.[2] Fiscal year 2021 alone witnessed nearly 11,500 refugees resettle in the U.S., a surprisingly and historically low number resulting from the refugee admissions cap established by the Trump administration. In May 2021, the newly established Biden administration revised the cap from 15,000 to 62,500 permitted admissions.[3] Since that time, and following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, refugee numbers have risen. In only the first six months following the withdrawal, 74,000 Afghans resettled in the United States.[4]

Although making up only a third of the global population, over half the world's refugees were children in 2020.[5] Refugee children often experience trauma during the transition away from their home country, in addition to the traumas they faced when at home. One study demonstrates that risk factors for refugee children's education and developmental challenges include past trauma, disrupted education, low-expectations for academic achievement and financial stress.[6] Additionally, parental experience and well-being directly impact children. The trauma imposed upon refugee parents fleeing life-threatening danger could certainly impact their children.[7]

Following refugees' transition to the U.S., three federal agencies and nine major resettlement agencies coordinate refugee families' resettlement and connect them with services to meet basic needs like housing and food.[8] The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) at the U.S. Department of State provides aid to refugees by guiding them through the process of resettling into a new home.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a bureau of the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also provides resources that help refugees become integrated in the U.S.[9] The ORR provides federal assistance to refugees by connecting them to critical resources that assist in integration. ORR programs support refugees who are ineligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Medicaid by providing cash, social services and medical assistance for up to 12 months.[10]

The process of receiving these benefits and the amount distributed differs by state. In addition to connecting recently arrived refugee families with services to meet their basic needs, the Administration for Children and Families works alongside the ORR to provide programs that support refugees with funds. One of these programs, Refugee Support Services, provides funds to help refugees "gain economic independence by helping them find and maintain employment, preferably

within a year of being enrolled in the program."[11]

Additionally, the United States Citizen Immigration Services Department of Homeland Security, which oversees lawful immigration into the country, works with refugees to complete the necessary applications and interviews required to obtain refugee status.[12] Then, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) oversees this admissions process.[13] Finally, once approved as a refugee, U.S. Citizens and Immigration Services (USCIS) then provides medical exams, cultural orientation and travel assistance.[14]

Resettlement agencies work closely with federal agencies and assist refugees with initial resettlement, including a place to live, employment services, registering children for school and connecting individuals and families with other basic services. Of these resettlement agencies, six are faith-based, including: Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and World Relief.

The Department of State's Reception and Resettlement program supports refugees for their first three months in the country, and the Department of Health and Human Services partners with the resettlement agencies to provide more long-term needs such as financial and medical assistance as well as language, employment, and social services.[15] Federal statutes require refugees to apply for permanent residence, often called a green card, after one year in the U.S. After five years, the U.S. allows refugees to apply for citizenship.[16]

In addition to connecting recently arrived refugee families with services to meet basic needs, the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Refugee Support Services (RSS) aids refugees to "gain economic independence by helping them find and maintain employment, preferably within a year of being enrolled in the program."[17] ORR's refugee support services focus on providing job training and development by assisting refugees in finding jobs and keeping them. As an indirect-aid program, ORR gives individual states funding to manage and administer their own programs.[18]

As refugee parents enter the U.S. workforce, assisted by federal support, they require accessible and culturally competent child care that promotes the development and wellbeing of their children. Job support does little when parents cannot work.

Child Care in the United States

Much crucial child development — physical as well as emotional, relational, and mental development — occurs during early childhood. For families with one or both parents working, child care can provide high quality, safe and developmental assistance with raising children. In this report, "child care" adopts the definition of "adult supervision and care by someone who is not the child's parent or legal guardian while the child's parent(s) are working."[19] This definition includes children ages 0-5, or up until the child enters kindergarten.

This report explores both home-based child care as well as center-based care. Home-based care includes hiring someone to either come into the child's home or taking the child to another adult's home for care. A neighbor, family member, friend or licensed professional can perform this care. Center-based care, however, includes only licensed centers, whether for-profit, nonprofit or public.

Parents have varied preferences for the type of care they believe would best serve their children and situation. For many refugees, the U.S. represents a completely new culture, and parental expectations for child care may not cleanly align with readily available options.[20] Some families may prefer a trusted friend or family member who speaks their native language to care for the child in a home-based setting. Others may prefer a faith-based service, while still others may opt to socialize their young children in a public program. In any case, parents should have the ability to choose what will best serve their child.

Although every parent should have access to affordable, high quality and culturally competent child

care, the reality is that many parents have few options. In 2018, 83 percent of parents with children under five reported that they face difficulties finding quality, affordable child care.[21] For refugee families, these challenges only amplify. Three primary barriers to child care for refugee families are affordability, accessibility and culturally competent care.

Affordability

In 2019, the median household income in the United States rested at approximately $70,000.[22] The Department of Health and Human Services defines affordable child care as requiring no more than seven percent of a family's income.[23] According to Child Care Aware of America, the average cost of child care sits at $9,266 per year, exceeding seven percent of the median income, and far exceeding seven percent for low-income families. As noted above, the income level for refugees falls well below the national median.[24] For the first five years in the U.S., refugees collectively represent an average annual household income of only approximately $22,000, resulting in child care costs far out of reach for many refugee families.[25]

Accessibility

Accessible child care allows "parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, [to] enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs."[26] However, over half the country lives in a 'child care desert,' or an area where little to no available licensed child care is available.[27] Approximately one third of children under age 5 regularly need care from a non-relative yet there are not enough care providers to meet this need.[28]

Child care deserts are more prevalent in rural areas than urban areas, but low-income urban areas experience the same rate of child care deserts as rural communities.[29] Whether in a child care desert or not, refugee families often experience transportation barriers which may make it difficult to go to and from care providers. It may take time for families to purchase their own car after resettling, and some may never have access to a car. Likewise, public transportation may not be an option.[30]

As a result of these accessibility factors, refzgees tend to choose home-based care.[31] Additionally, home-based care may work better with parents' work schedules as well as ensure parents feel comfortable with cultural preferences and communication styles.[32]

Culturally Competent

Cultural competency involves actively creating an environment that affirms each child's worth and dignity while respecting cultural differences, and is defined by the Child Welfare League of America as "the ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations and faiths or religions in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each."[33]

Culture provides the lens through which people evaluate the world.[34] Every person has a culture and a way of doing things grounded in their cultural values and beliefs, and each person should receive dignity and respect no matter their cultural differences. Many independent factors influence cultural sensitivity, including respect of different practices and even linguistics. Language carries strong saliency to cultural identity, but child care with proficient foreign language speakers may need to do more than respect language differences. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Cultural and linguistic competence suggests more than just language proficiency, but a commitment to incorporate the cultural knowledge into policy and practice."[35]

Refugee families — coming from varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds — may bring culturally different perspectives on discipline, authority, morality and comfortability in relation to child care. While U.S. care centers need not uproot their typical *modus operandi*, finding room in the extant practices for inclusivity would be beneficial for refugee families. At the very least, care providers should receive education on the cultural differences their pupils may bring into the care center.

Many refugees have experienced hardship and potentially traumatic situations. The Administration for Children and Families, a division of the US Health and Human Services, provides trauma-informed resources for individuals who work with refugee and immigrant children. Child care providers ought to take advantage of these materials in order to better serve refugee children and families. Designed to provide descriptions of what refugee children have experienced, such as exposure to war and violence as well as separation from family members, these curricula could do a great service to refugee families.[36] Understanding how to interact with and care for children who have experienced trauma is essential for care providers in order to best care for refugee children who have experienced traumatic situations.

Government-Subsidized Child Care

In partnership with resettlement agencies, the federal government provides support for refugees during the resettlement process. The Department of State's Reception and Resettlement program supports refugees for their first three months in the country, "including enrolling in employment services, registering youth for school, applying for Social Security cards, and connecting them with necessary social or language services."[37]

The federal government also administers programs directly related to child care funding. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) directs federal funding to state governments which then subsidize child care for low-income families with children under 13 years of age.[38] These funds also "support child care programs to achieve higher standards [and] provide consumer education to help parents select child care that meets their families' needs."[39]

The CCDBG supports child care via two avenues: certificates provided directly to families to pay for child care at their provider of choice, and grants or contracts awarded to child care providers to subsidize the cost of their care. The CCDBG Act prioritizes certificates given directly to families over contracts awarded to child care providers since the certificate system allows parental choice of child care providers.[40]

Fortunately, people with refugee status can receive most available federal public benefits, including child care assistance. Refugee families are eligible for CCDBG certificates and can redeem these at the child care provider of their choice, including faith-based child care centers, for-profit centers or licensed home-based care providers.

Looking Ahead

Had Gami known about the CCDBG or other available resources, she may not have worried about managing her young children, her home and her job. As refugee families navigate the myriad challenges that accompany resetting in a new country, accessible, affordable and quality child care can provide a much-needed lifeline, but only if families know about the available options. While the federal government supports child care through a number of programs, other members of civil society can step up to assist in connecting the vulnerable to these programs.

FRAME

Refugee resettlement programs and practices must focus on promoting flourishing for refugees. Welcoming refugees requires supporting individuals and families as they acclimate to a new environment and empowering them to contribute their gifts, talents and cultural-religious traditions to American life. Additionally, the Christian faith places a heavy emphasis on caring for foreigners, a practice that provides ample opportunity to reflect the love of Christ. In practice, this support can adopt many varying forms, but perhaps one of the greatest opportunities for servicing refugee families involves serving their children.

As noted above, refugee families greatly rely on child care when resettling into the U.S. and entering the workforce, as it provides the opportunity for children to receive care while refugee parents earn an income to provide for their family. Importantly, early childhood represents a critical time of development, and child care must promote

healthy development during these essential years.

Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child observes that "healthy development in the early years (particularly birth to three) provides the building blocks for educational achievement, economic productivity, responsible citizenship, lifelong health, strong communities and successful parenting of the next generation."[1] Child care must provide services that support the healthy development of children, in part because children rely on that development for the rest of their lives — the success of these children, their communities, their families, and the future of those children can be impacted by child care.

In the United States, however, there exists a large gap between the demand for accessible, affordable child care and the supply. Sadly, many refugee families face immense obstacles and barriers — such as limited income, lack of resources and low English proficiency — which add difficulty to accessing affordable and culturally competent child care.

A Faith Perspective

The Bible holds many examples of serving foreigners, and the sojourner archetype fills the scriptures. God's chosen people, the Israelites, lived as foreigners in Egypt, and after God brought his chosen people out of enslavement there and into the promised land, he told them "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt."[2]

God equally loves all people regardless of their visa status, home country or immigrant status — and he requires that his followers treat all people equally. Moreover, God clearly places special emphasis on treating foreigners with kindness, reflecting the broader biblical truth of treating the vulnerable with particular love and justice.[3] As both vulnerable members of society and foreigners in the U.S., refugees deserve this Biblical call for service.

The triune God created human beings in His image — the *imago dei* — as Genesis 1:26 explains. Part of bearing God's image involves living in relationship with one another, reflecting the personhood of the trinity. As God lives in unity and community with Godself, so should God's people. God created Adam and Eve to live in relationship with one another and to "be fruitful and multiply."[4] The family holds extreme religious significance because humans represent God's image through the familial relationship.

The Center for Public Justice describes the family as the "most basic of human institutions."[5] It serves as a foundation to all other institutions and areas of life because God created the family to reflect God's nature of truth. Family serves as far more than a legal contract between individuals; it serves as a lifelong bond and covenant of love and trust.[6] Government and society should support and protect family identity, not just as individuals, but as the whole family. Government, nonprofits, faith communities and local organizations must consider the implications society and government institutions have on families and whether they positively or negatively impact families, including families in refugee communities.

Along with the command to multiply and fill the earth, God instructed Adam and Eve to subdue the earth and have dominion over the living creatures. God created humankind with the unique purpose of working and taking care of creation. Work provides the opportunity and privilege to intentionally steward God's creation and provide for human needs. Similarly, God gave humanity the family as a gift and an institution ordained as a covenantal bond. Considering the twin mandates God gives humankind to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth and subdue it, work and family life do not necessarily need to conflict, but together can complement each other in the pursuit of public justice. In this vein, child care must be available for parents with young children to work a job that requires them to be away from their child. Public policies should be structured in a way that helps meet the child care needs of those who are most in need in our communities.

Early Childhood and Care

Children are born dependent on parents to provide for their needs. As parents or another primary caregiver meet their children's needs, those chil-

dren begin to trust that their caregivers will provide for their future needs and then feel free to explore their environment, play, and grow.[7] John Bowlby, a developmental psychologist, describes this relationship of emotional bond between a child and caregiver as attachment. The primary caregiver works as an attachment figure who provides a "secure base" for the growing child to feel confident enough to explore the world. Neuroscience demonstrates the importance of having positive interactions in the early stages of life to support a child's abilities, development, health and behavior as an adult.[8] This means that children's relationships and experiences at a young age directly influence how they grow and mature.

Children who receive sensitive and consistent responses from their caregivers develop a healthy sense of secure attachment tend to show higher levels of self-esteem by age 10, have better and longer peer relationships during adolescence, are more satisfied with romantic relationships and exhibit help-seeking behaviors in early adulthood.[9] On the other hand, adverse long-term outcomes develop for children with insecure attachments. Unhealthy childhood attachment leads to both physical and mental health illnesses later in life.[10] The lack of healthy childhood attachment "is a key factor in intergenerational parenting difficulties, and predisposes children to substance abuse, temper problems, homelessness, promiscuity, early pregnancy and criminality."[11]

When parents go to work and leave their child, it remains important for the child to have consistent caregivers to provide healthy relationships. If parents work and children have no caregiver for extended periods of time, the child may not establish the needed attachment for healthy development.[12]

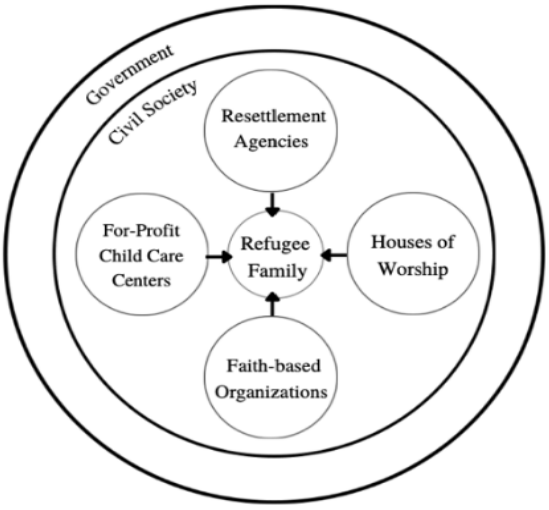
Refugee children, like all children, require strong attachments to parents and caregivers in order to form proper attachments and relationships for healthy development. Sadly, many refugee children have experienced traumatic situations that put their physical and mental health at risk.[13] Trauma may also cause difficulties for children properly forming relationships and attachment.[14] This means that refugee children have an even greater need for consistent caregivers who can provide for their needs. Child care programs have the potential to mitigate these risk factors, promote children's health and foster skill development.[15] Proper child care is important because each individual's future is greatly impacted by their childhood experiences. This then affects society as a whole and plays a part in restoring God's intended order for creation and society.

Ecological Systems Approach

According to the ecological systems theory of human development, multiple layers of environmental influence affect an individual child's and adolescent's socio-emotional, cognitive, linguistic and spiritual development.[16] The first level of influence, called the microsystem, is composed of immediate contexts in which a child directly interacts and participates, such as family members, friends, teachers and church. These contexts of family, neighborhood, school and church do not exist independently, but rather they operate interrelatedly in that what occurs at home also impacts what occurs at school and so on. This interaction between the different aspects of a child's immediate context is called the mesosystem.

The following layer is the exosystem and it includes institutions such as hospitals, parents' workplaces and financial institutions that children do not necessarily come in direct contact with but still impact the child. The exosystem also includes governmental institutions, which impact the flourishing of children and families through their policies and programs. The outermost layer is the macrosystem and it includes cultural values and beliefs. The institutional policies and practices based on cultural values and beliefs influence the interactions between the systems.[17] In sum, the levels, from center to exterior, are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

People experience stress when they face a demand which they feel unable to meet.[18] Refugee families face stress in terms of child care because they have a need for their children to be cared for while they work, yet they cannot



Graphic designed by Rachel Smith

meet that need either due to unawareness of available child care or the available child care is inaccessible.[19] In order to alleviate stress to promote flourishing for families, refugees must have both awareness and access to child care. Reducing this stress can be done through an ecological systems approach.[20] Dr. Diana Garland, explains "The ecosystemic perspective uses ecology as a metaphor for the relationships human systems (families) have with their physical and social environments."[21] An ecosystemic approach to caring for families considers the way in which the intra-familial and extra-familial physical environment, social systems and relationships affect the family.[22]

The government and civil society both play important and unique roles in providing for refugee families. Institutions within civil society such as resettlement agencies, faith-based organizations, houses of worship and child care centers also play unique roles in providing resources to help alleviate stress for refugee families. Optimizing their unique roles, government and civil society can work together to help refugees become aware of and have access to affordable and culturally competent child care. These diverse institutions are separate yet connected in that they each have different roles, but all play a part in an individual's life. The impact from these various spheres has the potential to greatly help refugee families when applied towards reducing stress and providing accessible, affordable and culturally competent care. Each institution makes a unique contribution and works together to help refugees receive needed child care.

Role of Government

In the United States, the federal government lays a framework of child care policies and programs that state and local governments coordinate and administer. According to The Center for Public Justice's Guideline on Family, "Government should recognize and protect the family as an essential expression of its responsibility to uphold a just society."[23]

Moreover, the role of government in child development is consistent with biblical views on human flourishing. In his foreword to Unleashing Opportunity, Dr. Richard Mouw references Psalm 72 and explains how God intends for godly rulers to work for justice and righteousness, defend the cause of the poor and serve the well-being of needy children.[24] The government works alongside civil society and families to support those in need and to uphold public justice.

Existing Governmental Programs: Child Care and Development Block Grant

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provides federal funding to states to subsidize child care for low-income families. Funds are distributed to families primarily through certificates that allow parents to choose a caregiver of their preference, including faith-based and licensed in-home care providers. This provides families with needed financial support, while giving them the freedom to choose the best option for their family. Child care providers can also apply for the CCDBG to subsidize the cost of their care. Resettlement agencies assist refugees in the process of applying for child care certificates. This process looks slightly different in every state, but one lead agency in each state oversees the CCDBG and how states distribute it.

However, one of the main difficulties for the CCDBG to successfully implement care among the refugee population is its accessibility. The very people who can benefit from this program the most are often not aware that such programs exist.[25] Moreover, the application process is often lengthy,

complicated, and requires outside help from someone knowledgeable about the CCDBG. Filling out one part of the application incorrectly may cause a delay and further complications. Pastor Trent DeLoach, who has built relationships with refugees at Clarkston International Bible Church, expressed that many refugee families have indicated that the time and work it takes to receive government assistance is too difficult.[26] In addition, the government subsidy for families with multiple children may not be enough to significantly improve a refugee family's economic independence.[27]

Refugee families need government funding to find affordable, safe child care options. Because it is difficult to help refugees access CCDBG programs, it may be more effective to give government funds to organizations that specifically work with refugees. Organizations that are focused on refugee communities can better support refugee families because they possess awareness of their specific needs and can help ensure that refugees receive available funding for child care. Kim Sturgeon, Program Manager of Hands Connected, states:

"Investments in local programs working with specific populations would greatly expand access to quality care for diverse families as well as assisting with navigating licensing and subsidy requirements. A small investment in consistent, ongoing support would pay large dividends in terms of creating quality child care options for diverse families and engagement in early childhood community support services and resources to ensure that children are on track developmentally during the critical formative years."[28]

In order for government funding to help refugees, they must have access to it. The federal government should disseminate this information to refugees through community agents who have formed relationships with refugees and understand their needs.

Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development

Another program designed to assist refugees in accessing child care — in addition to finding employment — is the Refuge Family Child Care Microenterprise Development (RFCCMD).[29] Administered by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, this program helps refugees become licensed home-based child care providers. The program exists to provide refugees who have lived in the United States for less than five years with "training in child care and business skills, assistance with applying for a child care license, and a cash stipend of up to $3,000 for supplies and materials needed to run their business."[30] This program helps refugee parents get jobs, children to receive care and businesses to flourish.

The RFCCMD program is currently funded in only eight cities across America as a part of a three-year program.[31] Eight cities is a very small number compared to the 222 approved resettlement locations in different cities across the U.S.[32] In order to truly see the impact of this program, it requires broader implementation. Additionally, the program needs greater funding to better support refugees in meeting the state requirements for licensure and fire and safety codes. The Migration Policy Institute states that child care providers face substantial challenges related to helping refugees meet these requirements.[33] The original startup of a child care business may require extra expenses that refugees simply cannot afford. The RFCCMD can help refugees in covering these costs thereby providing additional options for services.

Role of Civil Society

The Bible talks about children in the context of family, both nuclear and extended, as well as the importance of accepting children in society. Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."[34] Children are important to Jesus, and he wants them to be treated with care. The way society interacts with families and children directly relates to the core tenets of our Christian faith.

From a public justice perspective, it makes sense for both government and civil society to have unique, and sometimes overlapping, roles in their support of families, especially refugee families. While the government can create policies that encourage and promote affordable and accessible

child care for families, civil society can also make distinctive contributions to help facilitate easy utilization of the programs established through public policies. These institutions, including nonprofit organizations, both secular and faith-based, houses of worship and businesses, work as a bridge between government policies and the public. Beyond simply bridging the gap between government and the community, civil society can uniquely care for people in a personal, individualized way which the government simply cannot do. Immersed in their particular community, members of civil society organizations know the needs and struggles of those in their community, and this knowledge allows them to better support their communities in a meaningful way. Civil society organizations can establish personal relationships with refugees that allow for them to personally serve these individuals and provide needed care for their children.

Faith-Based and Secular Nonprofits

Resettlement agencies, faith-based organizations, houses of worship and child care providers are nonprofit organizations that support refugees and help provide child care. These organizations provide value to society as their "mission and purpose are to further a social cause and provide a public benefit."[35] These two elements alone make nonprofits beneficial to society. The fact that these organizations operate locally and are embedded within communities provides opportunities for them to form a relationship of trust with individuals and families. These relationships allow nonprofits to truly know members within a community, including refugee families, and to understand how to best serve them.

Resettlement Agencies

There are currently nine major national resettlement agencies that coordinate connecting refugee families with services to meet basic needs such as housing and food. These nonprofits assist refugees during their initial resettlement period by supporting basic needs, such as locating housing, enrolling in employment services, registering children for school, applying for Social Security cards and connecting refugees with social services. In addition, resettlement agencies also provide for refugees' long-term needs, such as clarifying legal status, acquiring permanent residency, applying for U.S. citizenship and achieving economic independence.

As one of the major resettlement agencies, Refugees International serves refugees worldwide and does not use any government funding in order to remain an independent agency. The organization focuses "on the important refugee, displacement, humanitarian, and human rights issues that need urgent attention and action."[36] This agency addresses the most urgent issues through outreach and service programs as well as political activism.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants also resettles refugees. This agency differs slightly from Refugees International in that it specifically focuses on supporting refugees and immigrants by providing legal services including work authorization, green card renewal applications, naturalization as well as many other legal services.[37]

Resettlement agencies hold the unique ability to operate as connectors between government institutions and refugee families. These organizations settle families into homes and help them begin new lives. A critical component of building a new life and moving out of poverty includes gaining access to affordable child care. Resettlement agencies help ensure that refugees and the surrounding child care providers have access to child care subsidies provided by the government and bridge the gap between refugees, child care providers and government institutions.[38]

Because resettlement agencies work alongside refugees, these organizations should seek to instill high levels of cultural competence into their employees. Today, there exists an insufficient level of cultural competency in refugee service settings due to "a lack of clear definitions and operational guidance, and insufficient attention to the unique challenges faced by people from refugee backgrounds."[39] Providing culturally sensitive service to refugees as they resettle in the U.S. involves educating workers about what it means to be culturally competent as well as putting an emphasis on providing for refugees' specific needs according to their culture, which itself

necessitates a thorough understanding of those diverse cultures. While it is essential for resettlement agency services to demonstrate cultural competence, the lack of a clear definition as well as a lack of practical guidance on how to implement cultural competency often hinders resettlement agencies.[40] Thus, a clear definition of cultural competency and practical steps of how to incorporate cultural competency must be established.

Awareness of diverse cultures and recognition of the challenges thar accompany navigating life in the U.S. as a foreigner comprise a crucial component of a resettlement agency's role. Greater cultural competency training can help agency workers better communicate with and understand refugees as they assist them in navigating and integrating into U.S. societal, governmental, and cultural expectations, practices and norms. These agents require in-depth training in order to adequately attend to the specific challenges refugees face in transition.

Of course, these agency employees already provide immense help and assurance to refugees, but — as noted above — several systemic factors remain that need addressing. Establishing clear expectations of and definitions for cultural competency, and then incorporating those, will create a better experience for refugee families and the agents who work with them.

Faith-based Organizations

Six of the nine national resettlement agencies profess religious values, demonstrating the spirit and care of faith-based organizations. In today's still-rather-religious world, resettlement services rooted in faith would share a certain level of kinship with the 84 percent of people globally who profess a faith.[41] In Michigan, one in seven, or approximately 15 percent of child care providers are faith-based.[42]

Faith-based organizations can receive government child care funding either through grants or contracts awarded by various state agencies or via child care "certificates," similar to vouchers or scholarships, that state agencies provide to families. In 1990, when the federal government launched the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) — now sometimes referred to as the Child Care and Development Fund — Congress specifically created the certificate system to enable participation by faith-based providers, termed sectarian providers. Religious organizations retain the ability to incorporate religious teaching because the funding goes from the federal government to families, not directly to the child care providers.[43]

Bethany Christian Services provides an example of a faith-based organization successfully helping vulnerable children and families. With locations in 30 states as well as several international locations, Bethany offers a number of programs including Hands Connected, which provides "services for parents of young children so they have equitable access to knowledge and resources that will ensure they and their children are able to thrive." [44]

Built around the needs of the refugee community it serves, Hands Connected developed programming to aid refugee adults in starting child care businesses; in doing so, Bethany provided culturally and linguistically responsive and representative care.[45] Originally funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the program now receives funding from local foundations and county funding provided through Michigan's Kent County Ready by Five Initiative, a nonprofit organization providing funding for Kent county's early childhood programs.[46] Hands Connected partners alongside refugees for six to eight months providing "training, in-home consultation, technical assistance, and support through the licensing process" and then by offering "ongoing support with weekly virtual group meetings (with interpretation provided), in-home technical assistance, and monthly training opportunities" after the individual receives certification.[47]

Houses of Worship

Houses of worship, including churches, temples, synagogues and mosques, support spiritual formation and foster an environment of care by supporting individuals' emotional, spiritual, social and even physical wellbeing. Part of this holistic service includes providing and connecting people to social services. Spiritual development extends beyond a weekly worship service and involves the

multi-faceted development required by every person. Research has shown that when a faith-based curriculum supports all areas of a child's healthy development, it aligns with the science of early childhood education.[48] This means that ministry leaders must consider all areas of a person's life as each area impacts faith and spiritual development.

With respect to child care services, houses of worship may find that due to the many other responsibilities and community endeavors already underway, they lack the necessary resources to offer affordable, accessible care to their constituents and community members. However, even if a particular house of worship cannot launch or maintain a child care center, it can help connect refugee families with services that do provide such care. Moreover, other programming, such as offering skills classes that include professional development and language instruction, also helps refugees navigate their new homes. In essence, houses of worship can fill the gaps and connect refugee families to the services which may benefit them.

Finally, houses of worship may care for children outside of traditional child care services. Sunday school classes, day care, summer camps and church trips all provide care for children in addition to spiritual development. Clarkston International Bible Church, located in Clarkston, Georgia — a community with many refugees and immigrants — offers a seven-week summer camp where students can learn about the Gospel through art, athletics and academics.[49] Many houses of worship offer these services for free. Cross Point Church — located in Bloomington, Minnesota — lies between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, two cities with some of the nation's largest refugee populations, and it offers a free after school program for children while teaching free ESL classes to adults. Cross Point also offers a community development program which focuses on adult literacy, job training and life skills coaching.[50]

Churches and houses of worship need to hire and develop people with high degrees of cultural competence and familiarity with the needs of refugee families. This competence ought to include the ability to build partnership relations with local governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations which provide services and opportunities for refugees, as discussed above. Additionally, houses of worship ought to strive to build community among the foreigners in their communities, even if those people do not attend their services. Ultimately, these institutions should work to develop and provide for refugee communities living in the U.S.

Child Care Centers

For refugee parents, as discussed at length above, child care centers can provide a valuable resource; not only in the child care itself, but also the classroom, educational element, the trained staff and the other children.[51] Socialization between children and adults provides benefits to children and can allow the children to build community in their new homes. Additionally, this socialization facilitates the opportunity for cultural diversity which, according to Lisa Belfield of Purdue University, can aid in building partnerships, for "we must have a level of understanding about each other in order to facilitate collaboration and cooperation."[52] Thus, cultural diversity fosters understanding that leads to greater unity.

Child care centers in the refugee community need to specifically focus on hiring refugees to work at their centers. It may be difficult for refugees to launch their own child care centers or to provide licensed in-home care shortly after moving to a new country. Nonetheless, refugees offer valuable contributions to child care and could work for already extant programs. Unfortunately, the Migration Policy Institute observes that child care centers are often not located near where refugees live, creating transportation challenges.[53] Establishing child care centers close to the communities with the greatest need will help mitigate these transportation challenges and make a more convenient child care option for refugee families.

Studies show that refugee parents typically prefer informal, family-based child care because it offers a more accessible and flexible program, and "their preferences are also driven by an interest in shared cultural values, opportunities for parent engage-

ment and a desire for home-language support."[54] Creating child care centers designed to hire and train refugee parents and located within refugee communities would allow families to still benefit from the parent engagement and cultural and language values while also providing a job for the parent.

Government and Civil Society

Both government and civil society possess unique and important roles in the lives of every person living in the United States, including refugees. The government operates to provide a framework for civil society to offer more personal and individualized care for refugee families and their diverse needs. Nonetheless, there must exist a great deal of unity and collaboration between civil society and government programs, including funding, in order to most fully benefit the vulnerable communities such programs exist to serve. Ultimately, this requires connecting refugee families to organizations, programs and institutions which exist to aid and benefit them.

Child care remains one of the most essential services for newly immigrated refugee families. Empowering these families to care for their children requires more than simply offering child care near their homes; it requires affordable and accessible, culturally competent care with recognition of vocation, language, relationships, faith and development. In serving refugees, all members of civil society — from businesses to nonprofits, state governments to houses of worship — should look for ways to empower refugees as they build their new lives in this country. While child care alone will not accomplish this goal, it will certainly smooth the path to justice, equality and opportunity both now and for future generations.

ENGAGE

After resettling in the United States, a refugee mother spent time finding work. She successfully secured a job, but the hours were far from perfect. In addition to raising her six children, this mother also found herself working the graveyard shift at her new place of employment. In a difficult balancing act, she would put her children to bed, go to work and return home before they awoke. Children, however, often complicate plans. One night, her three-year-old woke up early, found a way to unlock the door, and began wandering outside looking for his mother. Thankfully, the police found the little boy and returned him, but in response to his escape, a court ordered all six children to be taken away from the mother, citing neglect.

This is a true story. Stephanie Solvig recounted this story in an interview discussing her work with refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. In the U.S., refugees face numerous barriers to employment, which carry real-world consequences. The town of Clarkston provides a case study for the child care challenges faced by many refugees, as well as ways to mitigate them.

The City of Clarkston

Drive 20 minutes east from downtown Atlanta, past Decatur and through the outskirts of the city, and you will find Clarkston. Keep driving, and you will see the primary sights: apartment complexes, a series of 1970's strip malls, a few scattered gas stations and railroad tracks. At first glance, Clarkston reflects the emptiness most of Atlanta's suburbs hold, but in this small town there is much more than meets the eye. Within Clarkston lies the most diverse square mile in America.[1] Home to numerous refugees and immigrants, half of Clarkston's residents are foreign-born.[2]

Clarkston's proximity to Atlanta provides well-connected public transportation and affordable apartment complexes — two important factors which contribute to the city's optimal amenities for refugee resettlement. Many of the stores stock Nepalese, Indian, Asian, Ethiopian and Mediterranean groceries and restaurants specialize in those cuisines. The apartment complexes reflect the diversity in that children from all different ethnicities and cultures run about playing with one another. As one writer — Katy Long — explains: in Clarkston "women gather nearby wearing bright African headscarves, and others cross the street in traditional Asian silk dresses, long black hair braided down their backs."[3] In many of the local restaurants and businesses, men and women

work and bring a piece of their culture to the city.

Over 150 ethnic groups and 60 different languages are represented in Clarkston.[4] Anna Joo Kim and Ashley Bozarth, whose work is published in the Journal of Urban Affairs, explain that "in many ways, refugees and immigrants have shaped the basic infrastructure of the city so that people of many cultures and backgrounds feel at home."[5] Clarkston is not only a place where many people from many different cultures live, but these residents shape the city as they make Clarkston home.

This small Atlanta outcropping serves as a model of how cities can inclusively welcome and integrate refugees into the community. The fact that many of Clarkston's residents cannot vote due to their status certainly adds complexities: tensions between the city and state as well as tension between native born residents and the immigrants who have moved in.[6] In researching refugees' interactions with city leaders and current issues in Clarkston, Anna Joo Kim and Ashley Bozarth explain that "the ways in which Clarkston, Georgia, is adapting to rapid migration-related change offer lessons for how smaller U.S. cities and suburbs — especially those outside of blue states and outside of global city frameworks — can integrate and incorporate new immigrants and new Americans into civic life."[7] Despite its challenges, Clarkston provides a model.

Refugee Life in Clarkston

Fleeing one's home and moving to a new, foreign country provides many arduous challenges. One of the many difficulties refugees face during the transition, is the transition itself: leaving the familiarity of friends, family and culture to enter into a world of unknowns. Clarkston aids in this transition, however; not because the town itself holds any great similarities to other nations, but because of the community.[8] Even in a town where "burned out apartment blocks that are virtually uninhabitable," and "where the poverty rate is more than 40 percent, [and] the prospect of cheaper rent can win out over fears of rat infestation and crime," the community is strong.[9] These are by no means ideal circumstances, but refugees have found ways to navigate these challenges and continue to create a community that is welcoming to other foreigners. Another challenge in Clarkston stems from language. While many refugees possess some familiarity with English, very few speak at a proficient level.[10] This language barrier can limit employment opportunities for new residents. Many recently resettled refugees in Clarkston work at a chicken factory an hour's drive north.[11] Groups of refugees from Clarkston ride together to the chicken factory where they work for low wages.[12] Interestingly, this type of work — easy to find, accessible and open to immigrants — catalyzed Clarkston's transition to an ideal resettlement location in the 1990s.[13] Many refugees in Clarkston also work other jobs in neighboring cities, in part because public transportation, like Atlanta's metro subway system, makes these jobs accessible to refugees.[14]

In addition to accessible employment and available public transportation, affordable housing and walkability also provide benefits to Clarkston refugees.[15] Unfortunately, as the town continues to grow, rental units have become more difficult to obtain.[16]

Child Care in Clarkston

Stephanie Solvig greeted me with a warm welcome and invited me into her apartment. We made our way to the back of her complex where she had set up tables, activities and books for the after school care program she manages. Stephanie works with Envision Atlanta, a non-profit ministry affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In addition to managing the afterschool program for refugee children, she also works for a local business in Clarkston. Throughout her time with Envision Atlanta, Stephanie has built relationships with many refugees, and she knows firsthand the difficulties they face.

Solvig explained that child care provides a major obstacle for refugees in Clarkston, despite the excellent community. In her experience, the three major difficulties that refugees face regarding child care are the lack of available 24/7 care, affordability and transportation.

Providing accessible, quality child care for refugees can have a significant impact on the de-

velopment of families and children. Clarkston families have members of all different ages, and many families live in multigenerational homes.[17] Pew Research Center says that multigenerational homes appear to provide some financial benefit and protect family members from poverty.[18] Although these living situations can ease the difficulty in finding child care, they do not eliminate it.

Child Care in Clarkston: A Refugee Perspective

Having just met me, Zahara welcomed me into the apartment she shares with her two daughters and began serving tea, dates and candy. Zahara is a wife, mother and child care center employee. Her oldest daughter joined the interview and translated some words for her mother. As we sat in her apartment, Zahara shared about her family: her grown son and daughter, her four-year-old daughter and her current pregnancy.

This small apartment has been home for the past three and a half years following her move from Afghanistan. Fortunately for Zahara, her job at the local day care provides free child care for her preschooler. She explained that if she had to pay for child care, so much of her income would be lost that "it would be better to stay home."[19]

Without any education into the services provided by the U.S. and local governments, Zahara did not know that she could be eligible for financial support towards child care. Although she did know about SNAP and other related services, she explained that as her and her husband began to make more money, they saw the benefits decrease faster than they could escape poverty.

Unfortunately for Zahara and other refugee families, transitioning off of welfare and into financial independence can be a long and difficult road especially because refugees' "longer-term livelihood needs … are systematically not addressed."[20] Refugees put most of their income towards monthly expenses and do not have much left over to put towards child care.[21]

In her article published by The Guardian, Katy Long says that for refugees, Clarkston is said to be "a starter city. Success means moving on, leaving its apartment complexes behind."[22] Once refugees begin moving out of this poverty and can begin providing more for their family, they often move to other places. As a result, many of the refugees living in Clarkston do not yet have the income to provide for extra resources like child care.

A lack of job availability and language barriers cause refugee parents to typically work non-traditional jobs.[23] If possible, parents work alternating hours so that one parent can be home during the day, and one at night, with some gaps in between where either both or neither parent is home.[24] In these gaps, it is important that children have supervision. Oftentimes, older siblings or relatives are the ones who play the role of caregiver.

One way refugees can be supported is by ensuring they have accessible and affordable child care. Helping ensure refugees have access to child care will enable refugees to focus on their jobs and provide for their families. From her experience, Solvig explained that child care offered in apartment complexes can meet these needs.

Having care available in the apartment complexes mitigates the transportation challenges. In-complex care also provides jobs for refugee parents that allows them to both walk to work and bring their child with them to receive care. This apartment complex care could be geared towards the specific needs of the members of the community and thus operate during the times needed by the parents, whether that be nighttime or weekend care.

Fortunately for those with the resources to afford it, Clarkson hosts multiple child care centers. Appletree Learning Center, located in one of the numerous apartment complexes, offers child care for children beginning in infancy. The center operates Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and charges prices from $120 to $160 a week per child — and subsidies are available.[25] Another local childcare center is Oasis Daycare, located in one of the main shopping centers in Clarkston and is open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. They provide care for infants and children and offer ser-

vice in English, Arabic and Spanish. The average cost of this childcare is roughly $120 a week per child.[26]

These centers are valuable to the community, providing both jobs and child care for refugee families. There are gaps that need to be filled, however, because these child care centers do not offer care on the weekends nor do they accommodate children whose parents work non-traditional hours. It is crucial that Clarkston develop the resources for these families to access care for their children that is both affordable and adequate for their families' specific needs.

Solvig emphasized the importance of child care center employees who work with refugees receiving education about the traumas refugee children may have faced. Trauma greatly impacts childhood and child cognitive development to such a degree that it alters child behavior. Child care employees should understand that poor or odd behavior from refugee children likely stems from the impact of devastating trauma.[27] Moreover, trauma can have generational impacts: adults can inadvertently pass their trauma down to their children, and children can form poor attachment to their parents, which may persist into adulthood.

Solvig recommends trauma-based relational intervention, or what she calls an "attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children."[28] Understanding what refugees have been through is crucial to help refugee families flourish after moving to the U.S.

Clarkston has a strong need for organizations to provide child care for young children on weekends and at night. As noted above, refugee parents may work long or odd hours, but their children still need care. Churches or nonprofits could help provide weekend care and programs for children to take part in while their parents are working. Many organizations have care for elementary children, but it is important organizations provide care for young children ages 0-5 because they do not yet go to school during the day, but their parents may still need to work.

Potential for Further Engagement

Kim Sturgeon, program manager of Hands Connected, a program under Bethany Christian Services, a resettlement agency that provides social services for vulnerable children, families, and refugees and immigrants, states that cultural and language appropriate care is extremely important for refugee families. She explained: "[The lack of appropriate language and cultural child care] was a significant barrier to accessing employment and education opportunities for parents. Those who did utilize childcare resources were most often in homes or centers where caregivers and parents were unable to communicate with one another. Cultural norms and values were not known, including familiar foods and parenting practices. The lack of communication did not allow for parents to understand and participate in their child's learning."[29]

To reduce child care barriers for refugee families and to support successful resettlement into the U.S., refugees need access to child care that is culturally sensitive to the family's needs and provides appropriate language services. Clarkston's diversity creates a unique opportunity for providing cultural sensitivity within child care programs.

Encouraging refugees to work in child care will provide jobs for refugee parents and allow refugees to use their own culture to better serve those in the community to provide more cultural competency and diverse languages in child care programs. Intentional focus should be put towards training and investing in refugees who are seeking employment in child care. Government programs and many other organizations such as nonprofits and churches can focus on providing this needed training and support for refugees seeking child care jobs.

One example of government support for refugees is the Refugee Family Child Care Microenterprise Development Program, which provides the necessary training, certifications and funding for refugees to start their own home-based child care program.[30] Managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, this program specializes in help-

ing refugees start child care services from their homes.[31] In Clarkston, this program has the potential to make a large impact, but refugees need to first become aware of its existence. Additionally, many of Clarkston's apartments, Sturgeon notes, do not meet the standards for the program.[32]

Renovation requires substantial investment. In Clarkston, these funds could come from nonprofit organizations or local businesses. As mentioned above, refugee families contribute greatly to Clarkston, and supporting those families will have great impacts on the city.

Additionally, refugees should receive some training on the available programs. Not all families will want to take advantage of the Microenterprise Program, but some may take interest in the child care subsidies. Like Zahara, many refugees do not know that these benefits exist, and therefore they remain without them.

In all instances of working with refugees — whether expanding their awareness of available programs or meeting their needs — multiple partners are needed.

Business, Church and Nonprofit Engagement

Unsurprisingly given its large refugee population, Clarkston is also home to many businesses, nonprofit organizations and ministries dedicated to serving resettled families. One local business that serves both the community and refugees is called Refuge Coffee, a small coffee shop operated out of a truck located in the middle of Clarkston. This business was designed to provide job training for refugees as well as a place for refugees to tell their stories and connect with the community and serves as a model of a way to engage with individuals in Clarkston while fostering community and providing employment.[33] Businesses like Refuge Coffee are born out of the unique makeup of Clarkston, and they exist to meet the unique needs of the community.

Churches, too, reflect this nature: Clarkston International Bible Church focuses on serving refugees by providing services and resources through ministry. Their programs include meeting basic needs for refugees, providing group support and therapy, and teaching English language and U.S. citizenship classes.[34] Clarkston International Bible Church is a "multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-generational church," and it provides a powerful example of how to engage with the Clarkston community in a way that is culturally competent and sensitive to the community's needs. [35]

Pastor Trent DeLoach leads Clarkston International and has worked with refugees for over 15 years. In a conversation regarding child care for refugees, DeLoach reiterated what many others had already noted: Refugees need support especially because they do not know about available programs and their financial resources are strained.[36] In fact, DeLoach noted, some of the biggest challenges refugees face stem from financial struggle: "We know many refugee families that cannot participate in much needed ESL classes because they cannot afford or obtain child care." [37]

Pastor DeLoach and others work each day to serve the refugees in their community from a faith background, and their work has not been done in vain. Heval Mohamed Kelli, a Syrian refugee, serves as an example of how churches can change lives. Katy Long, quoting Kelli, writes "Two days after we arrived in Clarkston, we were terrified. And then all these people arrived at our door with food, wanting to help us learn English."[38]

These people offering to teach English were from Clarkston's All Saints Episcopal Church.[39] Describing these church members, Kelli said, "They didn't look at all like us. But they changed our lives."[40] In addition to churches, several nonprofits serve refugees. The Refugee Family Literacy (RFL) and Family Heritage Foundation both provide excellent examples. RFL serves mothers and children by providing English classes and early childhood development programs for children aged zero to five.

Over 250 women and children are involved in RFL in Clarkston and benefit from learning together.[41] This program accomplishes several critical objectives: first, it helps provide mothers with time with their child; second, it teaches those mothers how to better care for their chil-

dren; third, it delivers personalized tutoring in English proficiency. Through each of these activities, RFL delivers a holistic education and support structure for refugee parents and children.

Family Heritage Foundation — a Christian ministry focused on serving refugee families and at-risk children through afterschool programs, summer camps, adult computer classes and youth development programs — strives to help children and adults obtain the resources they need to be successful. Also taking a holistic approach, Family Heritage tutors refugees in many areas of life so that each person is better qualified to succeed outside of the program and Clarkston.

Conclusion

Clarkston does not look like much at first glance. Devoid of any monumental tourist attractions, stadiums or museums, the town seems to live in Atlanta's shadow. What the town does offer, however, is a home away from home: a deep sense of community, a shared walk of life and a connectedness unrivaled across the nation. The Most Diverse Square Mile in America provides opportunities for the sojourner and the immigrant, but it still has a long way to go. But then, so does the rest of the United States.

The refugees living in Clarkston came from terrible circumstances and continue to face challenges as they build their new lives in the U.S. There is no simple solution on how to best support them, but there are small steps, each rooted in collaboration and communication, that can be taken.

Of all the needs and solutions, child care seems a great first step. In Clarkston, government, faith and nonprofit communities work together to provide a better life for refugee families. As Clarkston continues to strive to be a better home for refugees, hopefully the town will invest in affordable, quality child care that can model to the rest of the nation what these services can do for the most vulnerable among us. In fact, it already does.

About the Authors

Removing Barriers to Food Security Among Refugees in Buffalo, New York

Grace Retz graduated from Houghton University in 2022 with her bachelor's degree in biology and international development, with minors in global health and political science. She completed The Hatfield Prize during the spring semester of her senior year. Grace has been an active member of Journey's End Tutoring, a club at her university that serves refugees in the surrounding community through English tutoring. She now served as the club's president, and facilitated a home placement and setup project for a newly arriving refugee family last spring. Grace has a combined interest in healthcare and cross cultural service, and plans to cultivate those passions through future degrees in nursing and global health.

Michael Ritter, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of international development at Houghton University, where he teaches courses on poverty and development, public health, research methods, and non-profit management. His research focuses on program impact evaluation and water and sanitation in developing countries. Prior to teaching, Michael co-founded and managed a non-profit that addresses safe water in Haiti through a locally-driven social entrepreneurship model. He received a B.S. in molecular biology from Grove City College, an MPH in global health from Emory University, and a Ph.D. in environmental health from Tufts University. He and his wife Charoma live in Houghton, New York with their son.

A Better Way: Youth Diversion as an Alternative to Juvenile Probation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Kyle Chu is a second generation Chinese student at Messiah University. He is working towards a major in political science and international relations, along with minors in music and statistics. Kyle was born and raised in Ohio, where he attended Mars Hill Academy, a private classical Christian school, for most of his K-12 years. His interests span many areas, including playing basketball, reading Shakespeare, the Puritans, and George Orwell, eating Asian foods, playing piano, house remodeling, and maintaining planted aquariums. Kyle loves Jesus and wants to experience the expansion of His Kingdom.

Jason Renn, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of politics and international relations at Messiah University where he teaches courses in international politics and research methods. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with published research that focuses on the consequences of civil wars, the effect of international treaties, and quantitative methodology. Jason currently serves as the chair for Messiah University's Scholarship and Fellowship Committee where he helps guide students through the application process for national awards and is the coordinator for Digital Humanities at Messiah, using his experience with Data Analytics to support projects in the area surrounding the capital of Harrisburg. He and his wife live in Central Pennsylvania.

Access to Culturally Competent Child Care Services for Refugee Families in Clarkston, Georgia

Rachel Smith is a senior at Toccoa Falls College and is pursuing a degree in Family and Children's Ministry with a double minor in Bible and Theology and Outdoor Leadership and Education. She is passionate about caring for people facing difficult circumstances and enjoys helping others navigate challenges by seeking beneficial change. Specifically, Rachel hopes to work with parents and children. She believes that childhood is a crucially important time developmentally because it sets the foundation for a child's life. She plans to minister to families by either working directly with children or by supporting and guiding parents in raising their children. While at Toccoa Falls College, she serves as a Resident Assistant in the upperclassmen dorms, acting as a mentor and leader by building relationships and creating accountability for the residents. She also serves in Toccoa Elementary School as a third-grade mentor, where she meets with a child weekly to listen and talk about their life. In her free time, Rachel enjoys participating in outdoor activities in the North Georgia mountains, creating art projects, and investing in the community of her college campus.

Piljoo Kang, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of psychology at Seattle Pacific University, where she teaches courses in lifespan developmental psychology, social psychology, child & family advocacy, and research methods. She received her B.A. in Psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, Master's degrees in Education from Harvard Graduate School of Education, Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, and Linguistics from California State University, Northridge, and Ph.D. in Child and Adolescent Development from University of California Santa Barbara. Her primary line of research focuses on the sociocultural and contextual influences of family, church, and community mentors on spiritual development and psychological functioning among children and adolescents from marginalized groups. In addition, her current research includes White racial identity development among emerging adults. She studies the intersectionality of multiple identities, namely racial, geographical, and religious: White Southern Christian. She and her artist/dentist husband live in Georgia and love traveling, especially to visit their three grown children in Los Angeles, California and Brooklyn, New York.

Endnotes

Removing Barriers to Food Security Among Refugees in Buffalo, New York

By Grace Retz & Michael Ritter, Ph.D.

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A Better Way: Youth Diversion as an Alternative to Juvenile Probation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

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