Serving the Tucson Refugee Community: A Snapshot of Key Issues and Concerns 2010-2011

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This report was prepared by graduate and undergraduate student researchers at the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA) in the School of Anthropology at the University of Arizona. Building on work conducted over almost a decade during which BARA researchers responded to and initiated questions for study, the researchers set out to investigate several issues facing BARA, Tucson’s refugee community, and the myriad service providers in Tucson who interact with refugees.

• Which challenges do refugees and the organizations serving them face, especially given the current economic downturn, and what strategies are they using to overcome those challenges?
• How can BARA students and faculty work with resettlement agencies, refugee groups, and the Tucson community at large to be more engaged in solving the problems and challenges faced by refugees and service providers in southern Arizona?

As the study progressed and particular issues emerged, the focus was narrowed to address the following questions.

• How are the organizations that serve refugees in Tucson using cooperation and collaboration as strategies for surviving in the current unfavorable economic climate?
• What specific roles do language and communication play in refugee resettlement?
• Which groups at the University of Arizona are working with refugees and service providers, and what role can BARA play to help better coordinate efforts by all participants to serve refugees and service providers more efficiently and effectively?

Recent History of Refugee Resettlement in Tucson, Arizona and the United States

While refugee resettlement has been primarily the responsibility of voluntary organizations since the 1950s (Wright 1981), the history of refugee resettlement in Tucson, Arizona cannot be analyzed without also considering government policies at local, state and national levels. The current refugee resettlement laws and regulations were implemented in the 1980 Refugee Act, which aimed to establish a federally funded domestic refugee program under a public-private partnership model (Holman 1996). This chapter places refugee resettlement in its local, state and national contexts in order to help readers better understand the research findings reported here.

Refugee Arrivals

According to Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reports for 1980-2010, the number of refugees coming to the United States annually is relatively low (around 75,000 individuals) when compared to the estimated 11.2 million undocumented immigrants (Passel and Cohn 2010). Yet, that number is significant and, in Arizona, it is growing. In the last decade, Arizona has consistently been among the top ten states in terms of both average annual refugee arrivals (Table 1) and number of refugees per capita (Table 2). The state’s ranking has increased
significantly from 17th in the number of refugee arrivals for the years 1980-2009 (Table 3). For the past ten years, Arizona has received an average of 2,458 refugees per year, ranking 7th among all the other states (Table 1).

The situation during the past five years is even more dramatic; the 10-year average hides the record numbers which came to Arizona in 2008, 2009 and 2010, when the number of refugees exceeded 3,000 per year, and was close to 5,000 in 2009. Around one-fourth of the refugee population in Arizona comes to Pima County, where the city of Tucson, with a population of 520,116, is located (U.S. Census 2010). Approximately 69 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, Tucson receives large numbers of both documented and undocumented immigrants from Latin America.

1 The refugee arrival numbers can slightly vary between individual state refugee resettlement offices and the national Office of Refugee Resettlement.
Origins of Refugees

Over the last three years, approximately 2,500 refugees have resettled in Tucson. For the Fiscal Year 2011, 900 refugees are expected to arrive in Tucson.² Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program (2001) data indicate that, in the 1980s, refugees from Vietnam (10,507), the Soviet Union (1,863) and Cambodia (1,447) were the largest groups to arrive in Arizona. In the 1990s, the largest number of refugees came from Bosnia (6,803) and in the 2000s most refugees came from Iraq (6,935), Cuba (4,664), Somalia (4,114), Myanmar [Burma] (3,278), Sudan (2,040), Bhutan (1,870), and Afghanistan (1,775). Although it is difficult to know the exact size of each community, especially given the secondary migration and relocation that occurs over time in any ethnic community, employees of refugee resettlement agencies report that three groups have more than 1,000 members in Tucson: Iraqis, Bhutanese (ethnic Nepalese), and Somali Bantus. Smaller refugee communities include Burundians, Sudanese, Congolese, Burmese, Vietnamese, Meskhetian/Ahiska Turks, Bosnians, Iranians, Eritreans, and Russians.

Funding

Refugees receive financial assistance in several forms. Members of families with minor children may qualify for the same cash and medical assistance programs available to other low-income residents. Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) are federally funded benefits provided through county human service agencies and voluntary resettlement agencies to needy refugees who do not have minor children in the home. Refugees are also qualified for other state and federal social services designed for citizens, such as food stamps, the Section 8 Housing Program, elderly and disability care, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Medicare. Other organizations which do not necessarily target refugees may also aid the refugee population. The assistance they provide can include mental health support; free clothing, cars, houses, and food; and various training programs or workshops.

Today, most refugee related expenses in the United States are funded by the federal government through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The Refugee Assistance Program, authorized by the Federal Refugee Act of 1980, provides federal funding via the ORR to reimburse states, resettlement agencies, and mutual assistance organizations (see below) for refugee assistance for a specific period of time, and provides per capita grants to resettlement agencies that sponsor refugees (Hein 1993). Until recently, federal funding for refugee resettlement has not increased very much, and recent increases do not make up for decades of flat funding. For example, monthly Reception and Placement Program (R&P) grants remained $350-450 per refugee from 1980 to 2010 and were only increased in 2010 to $900-1100 per refugee. By that time, the R&P grants had already declined in real value by more than 50 percent (Schwartz 2010). It is also important to note that this cash assistance grant was initially provided to refugees for the first 36 months after their arrival, but was drastically reduced to cover only the first 3 months after arrival in the early 1990s and has stayed the same since then (Bruno 2011). Similarly, the eligibility period for Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), which offers very comprehensive healthcare coverage, was

² The 2011 refugee arrival numbers are from the Quarterly Meeting of the Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program, June 6\textsuperscript{th}, 2001.
gradually reduced from 36 months to 8 months in the early 1990s. Given the current economic recession, with its high unemployment rates, and extensive employment without benefits, this reduction has had a negative impact on refugees as well as refugee service providers. This means that today’s refugees are getting far less assistance than their counterparts who came in the early 1980s.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, the average annual spending on refugees dropped nominally from $484 million to $411 million, but it has increased to an average of $565 million in the 2000s (Table 4). It was not until 2005 that the nominal value of the federal budget for refugees came to be what it was in the 1980s and started to increase. The 2010 budget was $730 million. Despite this increase, the budget’s real value decreased by 30 to 60 percent, depending on which real value calculations are used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1980s</th>
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<td>National</td>
<td>$484m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>$2m</td>
<td>$8m</td>
<td>$13m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eligibility</td>
<td>12-36 months</td>
<td>1-8 months</td>
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Source: Annual reports to the Congress prepared by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (1980-2010). Due to lack of information, 1997 and 1998 have been excluded from this calculation.

During this same period, in nominal terms, Arizona’s share of federal funds rose from $2 million in the 1980s to $13 million in the 2000s. Rising funding levels paralleled the increase in the number of refugees coming to Arizona each year. As of 2010, Arizona’s state refugee program budget funded by the ORR was $18,076,766.

Lack of necessary funding as well as out-dated refugee resettlement policies have created frustration among refugee organizations. These organizations feel increasingly overwhelmed by new arrivals, while realizing that they have not been fully successful in addressing the continuous service needs of refugees who are already in the system. This frustration is not limited to Arizona; it has been voiced nationally and documented in various congressional and university reports (e.g., U.S. Congress 2010, Adess et al. 2009). *Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for Refugees and Local Communities Burdened by a U.S. Resettlement System that is not Working*, for example, concludes that “the policies promulgated in the Refugee Act of 1980 and the current system of refugee processing, orientation, placement, and resettlement assistance are out-dated and fail to address the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse populations now being admitted to the United States” (U.S. Congress 2010: 1).
Data on Refugees in the United States and Tucson

The ability of Tucson organizations and service providers to understand and address the needs of refugees is hampered by a lack of comprehensive and reliable data. Available data on refugees in the United States and Tucson have serious limitations. ORR data gathering focuses on how many people are getting or not getting a certain service, or how many refugees attained certain levels of achievement, rather than on the quality of the services refugees receive. Information collected tends to omit crucial elements of the backgrounds of refugees, who range from college professors to preliterate individuals, and therefore poorly reflects conditions on the ground. In addition, although the ORR collects some data on refugees’ backgrounds, these data are disconnected from other kinds of data. For instance, the ORR does not link, data on the average hourly wage of refugees to information about their educational levels or levels of English proficiency. ORR simply lumps all the refugees together. As one Tucson refugee service provider pointed out, “We report [very simple] things to the Office of Refugee Resettlement . . . but they do not . . . [reveal] much. We need to look at the break down. Numbers . . . do not say anything about the household situation” (Personal communication 2011). Another important issue is that neither the ORR nor service providers gather much data about refugees after the first five years of resettlement, which significantly diminishes knowledge about long-term outcomes of refugee resettlement.

Formal Structure for Refugee Resettlement

The formal institutional structure for refugee resettlement includes the national Offices of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), state refugee programs, resettlement agencies (also known as Voluntary Agencies or VOLAGs), and Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs). The ORR is responsible for overseeing programs for refugees, asylees, certain Asian immigrants, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and victims of human trafficking. It also allocates funds (including reimbursements) to states, resettlement agencies and MAAs for services to these groups.

The resettlement agencies provide assistance to refugees during the first five years after their arrival in the United States. Refugees are entitled to federal funds on a per capita basis as well as to project-based grants, cash, and in-kind donations. Most resettlement agencies have several offices in the United States and/or throughout the world, have full-time employees at each office, and work on projects or have organizational interests outside refugee resettlement. As national organizations, they also receive capacity building support from their own main headquarters. In Tucson, there are three resettlement agencies: the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest (LSS-SW), and Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona (CCS-SOAZ).

As the number of refugees in Tucson has grown, so, too, have the staffs of the resettlement agencies. The three Tucson agencies increased their combined staffs from an estimated 15-203 in the 1980s to a total of 45 in 2011. However, high staff burnout is a significant concern. Each agency has only a handful of individuals who have worked in the refugee resettlement field for

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3 This is an estimate based on interviews with a few people who are familiar with refugee resettlement in Tucson Arizona in 1980s.
more than 10 years. Indeed, very few people in Tucson are familiar with refugee resettlement as it was practiced in the 1980s.

The MAAs are non-profit organizations designated by the ORR. A minimum of 51 percent of an MAA’s board of directors must consist of refugees or former refugees, both women and men. They tend to be local organizations led by refugees who are themselves still in the process of adjusting to a new society and who often have limited experience running formal organizations. They are smaller than VOLAGs, rely primarily on volunteers or part-time staff, and engage primarily with refugee resettlement and related issues. In Tucson there are three MAAs: the Somali Bantu Association of Tucson (SBATA, founded 2004 [Somali Bantu Association of Tucson 2011]), the Tucson International Alliance of Refugee Communities (TIARC, founded 1997 [Tucson International Alliance of Refugee Communities 2011]) and the Bhutanese Mutual Assistance Association of Tucson (BMATA, founded 2009 [Arizona Corporation Commission 2011]). These organizations are chronically underfunded; their funding comes from project-based grants from the ORR, Pima County sources, and donations from individuals and other organizations.

Refugees throughout the United States are also served by an extensive network of providers, ranging from educators and library staffs to medical personnel and police officers. Tucson is no different. The organizations and institutions with whom these providers are affiliated serve a broad range of Tucson residents, not only refugees, but because they face similar challenges when working with refugees, and generally must find funding and other resources themselves, they have attempted at various points in time to coordinate their efforts and share information about refugees. The Refugee Integration and Service Provider Network (RISP-Net), established in 2005 and one of the most recently launched coordination frameworks, began to provide a forum for information sharing and educating members of the Tucson community about refugees and services. RISP-Net operates as an open platform with a monthly meeting attracting around 40 people, and includes representatives from the state refugee program, VOLAGs, MAAs, healthcare organizations, libraries, police departments, school districts, and managers of apartment complexes that house refugees. A second network, the Arizona Refugee Advancement Coalition (AZRAC), was established in 2007 as a structured, statewide mechanism for bringing people together. Most of its activities focused on Phoenix. AZRAC initially succeeded in establishing ethical and professional standards, but eventually lost momentum, and at the start of this study was trying to redefine itself. Unfortunately, during its annual meeting, held on February 18, 2011, a quorum of board members voted to dissolve the coalition (Arizona Refugee Advancement Coalition 2011).

**Methodology and Outline of the Report**

This report presents both primary and secondary data. BARA student researchers began by reviewing and summarizing data collected by BARA faculty and students from the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2010. However, research team members also drew on either their prior experiences as volunteers with Tucson organizations serving refugees or research they had conducted with refugees in other U.S. locations (Norton 2011 and Coşkun 2009). Then, between the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011, BARA researchers participated in refugee networking meetings and conferences; attended committee, staff, and board meetings of Tucson-based
organizations; volunteered in refugee organizations; helped design and conduct training sessions; served as interpreters; and helped develop and administer a questionnaire to create a database and directory of current contacts within the Tucson refugee community. BARA researchers also interviewed a variety of stakeholders in Tucson, aiming to learn from as many individuals and groups as possible.

Snowball sampling proved to be an especially effective research technique. The research team began with individuals identified through their participation in public meetings and service provider networks. From those individuals, team members gathered names and contact information for people and organizations working with refugees in Tucson. Study participants included representatives of local VOLAGs, MAAs, schools, police, libraries, government agencies, and church groups, as well as Pima College and University of Arizona student organizations, departments, and other groups. BARA student researchers took notes and entered them into a secure data management system. They also developed a database to record the information they gathered on the University of Arizona community’s involvement with refugees.

Secondary data were drawn from the annual congressional reports by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services unit which shares responsibility with the U.S. State Department for coordinating refugee resettlement in the United States. In addition, BARA student researchers regularly consulted the minutes of meetings, websites, and announcements sent via refugee list serves.

The remainder of this report summarizes the results of the 2010-2011 data collection in Tucson. Chapter Two addresses issues of language, communication, and collaboration in refugee and immigrant resettlement in southern Arizona. Chapter Three discusses other key issues raised during this study, particularly those related to high levels of staff turnover in agencies and organizations of the refugee and refugee service provider communities. Chapter Four highlights several recent efforts to enhance information sharing and identifies additional opportunities for doing so.
CHAPTER TWO: LAYERS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN PERSONS WITH REFUGEE STATUS AND OTHER TUCSON COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Background

Refugee populations must confront histories of past oppression, communication barriers, mistrust of authorities, their own personal and family backgrounds, and their positions as members of particular ethnic communities (Lum 1992). Considering the abundance of high profile anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona since the turn of the 21st century, refugees in Tucson face additional challenges. While refugees are immigrants, refugees and other immigrants encounter many of the same difficulties upon entering the United States, and an ongoing debate problematizes the distinctions between economic and political migrants (Hein 1993). However, refugees do occupy a particular legal status that affects not only their access to services, but also other people’s perceptions of them. According to federal and international law, refugees have been pushed from their homelands by violence and oppression, while immigrants are pulled from their home countries by the lure of better opportunities abroad (Segal and Mayadas 2005). This legal and political distinction is important to keep in mind, because it is often the only thing linking the widely heterogeneous refugee communities in the United States. “Refugee” is a political status, and holders of this status come from all social classes. Unlike those immigrants who arrive in the United States with savings and some basic possessions, refugees fleeing active conflict zones often come with few or no resources and initially have very limited earning potential. Consequently, regardless of refugees’ class or status positions before leaving their home countries, they all become low-income Americans upon entering the United States.

People working in refugee resettlement report challenges in areas that are both expected and unexpected. For example, it surprises many working in resettlement when refugees refuse medical procedures and medications for cultural reasons, such as when many Vietnamese refugees refuse to comply with tuberculosis drug therapy because of “cultural interpretations of the therapy’s side effects as ‘hot’” (Ito 1999). Somewhat more expected problems include the difficulties refugee children face in assimilating to the American educational system. Not only do these children come with a wide variety of educational levels, they also often suffer from conditions stemming from their traumatic experiences, which can hinder their assimilation (McBrien 2005). Adult refugees are also more likely than other immigrants to suffer from mental health problems, and ailments like depression and anxiety are commonly reported as creating difficulties in refugee communities (Cohon 1981). Another challenging area is employment, as many newcomers take a while to develop “marketable employment skills,” particularly fluency and literacy in English (Strand 1984). Among host communities, refugee resettlement agencies, and refugee communities themselves, disparities in perceptions of people from different parts of the world exacerbate conflicts (Short 2004), foster distrust, and create social distance between community members sharing many of the same challenges and problems. The need for cultural interpretation can be as great or greater than that for language interpretation (Vargas 1999). And, even after reliable interpretation is in place and service providers establish a channel of communication, it is not uncommon for refugees to be reluctant to take advantage of available services (Balgopal 2000).
In a climate marked by increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, decreasing resources available to government funded programs, and greater competition among service providers, the challenges of refugee resettlement are exacerbated. In Tucson, representatives of organizations serving refugees point out that the refugee resettlement system was designed for a booming economy, or at least a stable one, where employment opportunities are plentiful, as well as for a much less diverse group of refugees than currently arrives in the city. Due partly to the rapid increase in immigration in the past ten years, Tucson’s population is very linguistically and culturally diverse. For example, a language program administrator for the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) reported in an interview that Tucson’s schools provide educational opportunities for speakers of up to 140 different languages.

Poor interpersonal communication is at the heart of many of the challenges of refugee resettlement in Tucson and deserves special mention. During the 2010-2011 fieldwork in Tucson’s refugee and refugee service provider communities, problems of access to language interpretation emerged as a salient and recurrent theme. In both interviews and participatory observation, BARA researchers documented language interpretation frustrations expressed by community members working in resettlement agencies, secondary education, adult education, educational administration, healthcare, public safety, and housing. Key issues raised include insufficient access to language interpretation, cultural and class biases among language interpreters, and inadequate compensation for language interpreters. Additionally, as mentioned above, BARA researchers observed that the need for cultural interpretation supersedes the need for language interpretation in certain situations involving refugee and immigrant communities.

This chapter takes a closer look at key elements of the network of organizations, agencies, and other entities that become central to refugees’ lives once they are in Tucson. It begins with the agencies whose specific missions include serving refugees and then examines four community sectors that interact regularly with refugees, focusing particularly on challenges in communication and language interpretation.

**Interactions Among Resettlement Agencies and Mutual Assistance Associations**

As noted in Chapter One, the resettlement agencies (voluntary agencies, or VOLAGs) currently active in Tucson are the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest (LSS-SW) and Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona (CCS-SOAZ). In Tucson there are three MAAs: the Somali Bantu Association of Tucson (SBATA), the Tucson International Alliance of Refugee Communities (TIARC), and the Bhutanese Mutual Assistance Association of Tucson (BMATA). Although these Tucson organizations regularly collaborate, particularly in the areas of job development and training, the relationship between VOLAGs and MAAs is at times strained. One point of conflict is access to funding, especially in the current climate of dwindling economic resources. Budgetary limitations associated with refugee resettlement, exacerbated by Arizona’s troubled economy, have increased levels of concern for both MAAs and VOLAGs.

Despite differing organizational reaches, capacities, and operational models of refugee resettlement, MAAs and VOLAGs make efforts to find common ground. For example, both
agree that Arizona’s budgetary limitations for refugee resettlement have numerous negative consequences. At the same time, VOLAGs and MAAs compete on an uneven playing field due to disparities in their size and organizational capacities. VOLAGs are national (and often international) organizations that receive annual federal funding for each refugee served, and have capacity building support. MAAs are usually local, dependent on funding that is not necessarily continuous, and are governed by boards of directors that must consist of at least 51 percent refugees. In a procurement process that favors services rather than capacity building, MAAs struggle to compete with better organized, better funded, and longer established VOLAGs.

In Tucson’s refugee community, VOLAGs are sometimes perceived as territorial organizations that try to act as “big brothers” to refugees. MAAs refer to themselves as “advocates of refugees,” but are seen by some as lacking enough staff to collaborate effectively. Both VOLAGs and MAAs participate, at least nominally, in RISP-Net. While some people criticize the network for being “too much talk without action,” others praise it as a great platform to share and discuss ideas, and educate the Tucson community about refugee issues.

The recent increase in the number of refugee arrivals in Tucson has added to the tension between VOLAGs and MAAs. Both types of organizations clearly want to help move refugees out of protracted, though ultimately unsustainable, stays in unpleasant camps or other unsavory international facilities for displaced persons. Yet, some MAAs are organized to support refugees from particular countries, regions within countries, and ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. They must therefore focus their attention on addressing the problems faced by refugees already in Tucson. Consequently, they struggle to serve current refugee clients with existing funding and are less inclined to promote expansion of their refugee service populations. By contrast, VOLAGs encourage the resettlement of more refugees (and their funding depends on having refugees assigned to their organizations), and both staff and volunteers pointed out to researchers that refugees in the United States are much better off than those still residing in camps overseas.

Both VOLAGs and MAAs have specific programs to address cultural and linguistic challenges, but each group of new arrivals requires new learning, and the development of a new network of interpreters and cultural brokers. Both are also highly dependent on volunteers for achieving their goals of helping refugees become established in Tucson. Volunteers are assigned directly to an individual refugee to help her or him learn and carry out basic life skills, and become adjusted to living in Tucson. In addition, volunteers provide organizational and logistical support in offices and at public events such as the Tucson Refugee Fest. A few interviewees who had worked in refugee resettlement during the 1980s reported that there were more volunteers at that time than at present. One individual who volunteered then remembered that each refugee family was assigned two volunteers, reportedly to promote camaraderie among members of the faith community that supported the refugees. Members of religious communities are still very involved in the refugee resettlement process today, with some congregations offering continuous and well-organized support to the refugees and service providers as part of their humanitarian activities. During this study’s time frame, the three resettlement agencies averaged around 50 volunteers, while one church group alone had 50-70 volunteers working with refugees, 30 of whom were regulars.

The University of Arizona provides a significant number of volunteers and interns to Tucson’s refugee and service provider communities as well. Though these engagements tend to be short-
term, some faculty and departments have developed ongoing projects or programs (see below). Interviewees from resettlement agencies, MAAs, and other private organizations spoke about high dropout rates among University volunteers, many of whom stay no longer than a couple of months. Some interviewees reported that they had learned not to trust University students as volunteers, while others worked with University students in limited ways, such as recruiting their help for large public events or meetings. Still, some volunteer coordinators had developed what they considered realistic expectations of University volunteers, and had learned how to approach these volunteers, identify volunteer opportunities that suited their availability and skill levels, and retain them through the end of their commitments.

Other Community Groups With Whom Refugees Interact

In addition to VOLAGs and MAAs, and the volunteers who work with them, refugees resettled in Tucson have interactions with other members of the local population. All of these interactions are strained by limited resources and colored by refugees’ ability (or lack thereof) to communicate with local community members. During fieldwork for this study, however, four ancillary sectors emerged as the most illustrative of the complications of Tucson’s inadequate linguistic and cultural interpretive infrastructure, often due to insufficient financial resources: housing, public safety, healthcare, and education.

Housing

In adjusting to life in Tucson, refugees face unique challenges in their search for affordable housing. These challenges range from straightforward issues like lower than expected living standards that cause occasional problems (e.g., many Iraqi refugees have expressed disappointment at the housing options available to them as low-income Americans) to insidious issues such as unjustified evictions when refugees end up with unethical landlords. However, most housing challenges fall somewhere in the middle. In general, refugees and the managers of the low-income apartment buildings where they reside during their initial years in the United States encounter myriad problems, many of which stem from combined economic hardships and language and communication barriers. Below is a brief overview of these issues based on interviews with the building manager of a complex, which is home to many refugees on Tucson’s north side. Interactions with refugees and service providers indicate that these problems occur in many other buildings across Tucson.

- Laundry: In order to save money, refugees often opt to wash their clothes by hand in bathtubs and sinks in lieu of paying to use washers. Similarly, some refugees also hang their clothes outside to dry, which is forbidden in some apartment complexes. Inability to communicate these rules and lack of money to use pay washers and driers creates tension between refugees and landlords or other tenants.
- Food storage: Coming from environments with little food security, some refugees hoard food and store it in places considered inappropriate in the U.S. context. This practice causes anxiety related to pest control on the part of many landlords.
- Youth: Poor communication among landlords, refugee parents, and refugee youth causes discord in a number of ways. Some apartment complexes have curfews for unaccompanied children, and inability to communicate this to parents directly causes
tension between refugee tenants and building managers. In many cases, refugee children serve as interpreters for their parents, and they may be reluctant to pass along messages to which they do not agree. There is also concern about the dressing habits of refugee youth. In some cases, young men emulate the styles they see on TV (e.g., baggy clothes or red bandanas), and building managers fear this will provoke the ire of local gang members residing in the same neighborhoods.

The problems listed above pale in comparison to the exploitation of refugee tenants that has occurred following bed bug infestation and relocations. Within the past two years, bed bug infestations have become a major problem throughout the United States, and some unscrupulous building managers in Tucson have used refugee tenants’ ignorance of bed bug treatment protocol and law to exploit their tenants. Managers have unlawfully forced refugees to pay for exterminators and unnecessarily dispose of personal belongings (furniture and clothes), and have scapegoated refugees as the source of bed bug infestations without evidence. In other instances, building managers have charged refugees for property damages after they have relocated elsewhere, without notifying their former tenants. This has ruined some refugees’ credit ratings for years.

Public Safety

According to a high-ranking Tucson Police Department (TPD) official known for outreach work with refugees, “The ability to communicate with public safety personnel is one of the biggest challenges facing the refugee community in Tucson.” Despite TPD’s efforts to deal with refugees fairly, problems arise regularly, many of which result from a lack of communication. Fieldwork revealed that refugees’ interactions with police are polarized: almost always extremely helpful or extremely disruptive, with little or no middle ground. In a refugee population with high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mistrust of authorities, even a minor citation can cause familial crises.

Despite an official Tucson policy mandating use of a telephone interpretation service\(^4\) for situations requiring foreign language interpretation, during incidents with non-English speakers, TPD officers often rely on the family members and neighbors of individuals involved in disputes. Refugees and refugee service providers have heavily criticized this practice, along with liberal issuance of police citations, which one resettlement worker described as “cite them all and let them sort it out in court.” In reaction to these criticisms, the TPD has been active in engaging and collaborating with refugee service providers and working to improve relations with refugees, all while facing debilitating budget cuts. Below is a story that circulated among refugees and refugee service providers during the fall of 2010, causing great concern among refugee service providers and TPD officers alike. Although the story has likely been embellished to some degree, the refugees who reported it earnestly believed it to be true. Regardless of its veracity or level of embellishment, its widespread circulation and perceived truth tangibly affects refugees’ orientation toward and relationship with public safety officers of all stripes.

\[^4\] Language Line and Cyram are two of the services used in Tucson.

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In September 2010 a Congolese refugee got lost while driving to the office on the first day of work at his new job. He was pulled over on the highway by TPD for
driving too slowly. After learning about his refugee status and that he was lost on the way to his first day of work, the TPD officer escorted the Congolese man to his new workplace and explained to his new boss why he was late. Two weeks later, the same Congolese refugee was waiting for a bus near TPD’s Hardesty Station on Alvernon Way and 22nd Street when three TPD officers approached him, drew their guns, handcuffed him, and threw him to the ground. After looking at his ID, they realized they mistook him for someone else. The TPD officers promptly uncuffed him and left without explanation or apology. As scary and confusing as this incident would be to any citizen, the Congolese refugee at the center of this story suffers from severe PTSD, and has refused to leave his house since the incident of mistaken identity.

This story serves as a testament and sobering reminder to the binary potentials of each intervention and interaction TPD has with refugees in Tucson. The point of this story is not to condemn the TPD; on the contrary, in spite of budget cuts and reassignment of vital staff, the TPD is taking strides to improve its perception and interactions with refugees in Tucson. Despite the goodwill the TPD has accrued from interactions with refugees like those conveyed above (as well as from anti-gang and sports-focused outreach programs), one or two negative interactions have long-term effects and are remembered longer than numerous positive ones.

**Healthcare**

Although the researchers did not set out to explicitly study healthcare among refugees in Tucson, several healthcare issues are directly related to language as a crosscutting theme in refugee resettlement in Tucson. Most prominent in discussions with refugees and refugee service providers were problems associated with the telephone based interpretation services. In fairness, it should be disclosed that BARA researchers did not interview representatives from any of the telephone interpretation services used in Tucson. However, several project members were present at a town hall meeting attended by one company’s president, where refugees and service providers voiced their growing concerns over the poor quality of telephone interpretation. Many problems were presented. Below is a summary of some of the major points discussed.

- Interpreters have made value judgments about refugee clients and communicated them to healthcare providers as if they were truth. In an example cited by one service provider, an interpreter suggested to a doctor that a patient complaining of a headache had mental health problems.
- Refugees in Tucson have started missing medical appointments because they do not feel comfortable with interpreters, arguing that interpreters constantly interrupt them, even when they are describing ailments or illnesses to doctors, and judge refugees. Interpreters’ treatment of refugees has led to some patients refusing to share private medical information.
- Congolese refugees claimed that Kiswahili interpreters from Rwanda exhibit national bias and prejudice that affects healthcare service.
- Arabic speaking refugees have noted that differences in dialect (e.g., when a Saudi is interpreting for an Iraqi patient) and social class can be very problematic when dealing with specialized medical terminology and information.
• Several service providers complained about hold times that regularly exceed 30-45 minutes.

The town hall meeting concluded with refugees and service providers feeling good about having their voices heard. The majority of sociolinguistic problems between refugee patients and telephone interpreters occurred between Arabic and Kiswahili speakers. Based on this meeting and other interactions with refugees and service providers, examining the link between specific languages, cultures, and class biases is an area ripe for future investigation.

**Education**

Two main entities undertake the majority of refugee education in Tucson: Tucson Unified School District (Tucson Unified School District 2011) and Pima Community College Adult Education (Pima Community College 2011a). Family Literacy (Pima Community College 2011b) and Refugee Education (Pima Community College 2011c), two smaller programs in Pima College’s Adult Education Unit, specifically aim to educate refugees and immigrants. BARA researchers interviewed instructors and administrators from each program and learned a great deal about the challenges of educating refugees in Tucson. They also learned how important particular programs are in the lives of refugees. For example, the vast majority of Tucson’s refugee population resides along or near Alvernon Way, between 29th Street and Fort Lowell Road, an area considered part of Central Tucson. According to knowledgeable sources in the TPD and LSS, refugees settle in this area because of its proximity to Pima College’s East Side Learning Center, where an estimated 90% of refugees take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at some point during their stay in Tucson. Researchers participating in training sessions on Tucson’s public transportation system, offered to newly arrived refugees, observed that, after being in the United States less than one week, refugees were taught how to use the city bus to reach three locations in Tucson: the resettlement agency office, the hospital, and Pima College’s East Side Learning Center, reflecting the latter’s importance to newly arrived refugees.

In addition to the aforementioned institutions, numerous public organizations (e.g., Pima County Public Library 2011), private ones (e.g., La Frontera Arizona n.d.), and religious organizations (e.g., Tucson Refugee Ministry 2011) offer educational services to refugees in various capacities. Based on fieldwork conducted during the year, BARA researchers identified a basic list of the benefits and challenges faced by refugee and immigrant education programs in Tucson. The inventory of issues is by no means exhaustive, but it does represent a good summary of issues reported by community partners throughout the year.

Adult education programs teach students basic language and life skills. However, these programs also give students opportunities to make friendships and construct social networks, build confidence that carries over into other aspects of their lives, and participate in community events and local politics. Instructors and administrators note that the linguistic and cultural diversity refugees bring to classrooms enhances the learning environment for all students. Research conducted for this study shows that, regardless of age or grade level, successful refugee and immigrant education programs include strong formal and informal mentoring programs, which build bonds among instructors, students, and community members. Bilingual education programs, which are important components of refugee and immigrant education, build literacy
skills in students’ native languages, develop study skills and build confidence that helps students succeed in other classes. Bilingual programs, however, have been under attack for the past decade not only in Arizona, but nationwide. Despite its “controversial” status in Arizona, bilingualism and bilingual education are consistently linked to many social and health benefits for people of all ages (Martinez 2011, Dreifus 2011).

Although working with refugee and immigrant students has numerous benefits, it also comes with many challenges, which can be divided into “natural” and “artificial” categories. “Natural” challenges are those inherent in working with diverse groups of students typical of refugee and immigrant education programs. Examples include communicating effectively in multilingual classrooms, incorporating students with little, no, or interrupted formal education, and creating lessons relevant to students of varied interests and backgrounds. “Artificial” challenges are socially or financially constructed. Among them are inadequate budgets for classroom interpreters, class bias among interpreters, and the lack of adult-appropriate training materials. BARA researchers found that “artificial” challenges are much harder for instructors, students, and administrators to overcome. During an interview, one local instructor mentioned that her program “would benefit from access to trained interpreters, people who are able to put aside their own cultural experience, facilitate communication objectively, and translate verbatim.” As in other areas of refugee interaction with local organizations, class bias in language interpretation has a devastating effect on education. Community partners in education have reported that instances of interpreters scolding refugees and making value judgments undermine capacity building efforts and make students feel unwelcome in class.

Summary

Not surprisingly, in this study, communication emerged as a multilayered and ubiquitous roadblock to smooth resettlement for refugees and collaboration among refugee service providers. Seemingly simple challenges, such as the near universal lack of qualified interpreters, blossomed into more complex problems upon closer examination. For example, class biases among available interpreters were found to be a major obstacle to effective communication across languages. Understanding and addressing such issues is a vital step toward building solidarity in a community that has become home to refugees and immigrants of diverse backgrounds and origins.

Based on the outpouring of frustration with the state of language interpretation by those working in Tucson refugee resettlement, BARA student researchers identified interpretation as a focal area for continued investigation. While there are many facets to this complicated issue, the following questions are among the most pressing.

- Are some ethnic groups more likely to exhibit cultural and class biases in language interpretation than others? If so, what can be done to address this problem?
- How can Tucson’s refugee service providers gain access to affordable and consistent language and cultural interpretation?

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5 Arizona Proposition 203, English for Children, was passed by 63 percent of Arizona voters on November 7, 2000. The legislation limits the types of instruction available to English Language Learner (ELL) students. Implementation began with the 2001-2002 school year.
• How can interested parties launch an affordable and sustainable language interpretation training program for refugees?
• How does the lack of access to language interpretation affect the quality of service resettlement agencies can provide to their clients in Tucson?
CHAPTER THREE: OTHER KEY ISSUES

While language and cultural barriers emerged as a key issue that cut across all groups and situations (see Chapter Two), a number of other issues were also raised during this study and will be discussed here. Many of the problems are associated with high staff turnover in Tucson’s refugee and refugee service provider communities and those who work with them, as noted in Chapter One. Based on discussions with the leaders of various refugee service organizations, BARA’s research team estimated that 80-100 service providers were working with refugees at the time of the study. Fewer than a dozen had worked in the refugee community for more than ten years, and a similar number had held their jobs for only a few years.

VOLAGs and MAAs, as well as other organizations that serve refugees, rely heavily on volunteers to carry out much of their work. Therefore, volunteers take on vital organizational functions and thereby become part of the structure of institutional memory and communication. However, volunteers, by the nature of their status, are inconsistent. Most volunteers have good intentions, some have exhibited incredible dedication, and a few have longer tenure in their roles than many staff members of the organizations they serve. Yet, most volunteers hold jobs, have other life responsibilities, and, often enough, just try to help a little when they can. In those situations, inconsistent and counterproductive task performance frequently occurs, precisely because the volunteers often serve as crucial nodes of memory and contacts. In interviews and meetings, representatives of VOLAGs and MAAs also noted that volunteers often come with their own agendas, wanting to work with a certain refugee group or to address a particular need, and this is very challenging in an environment where both populations and needs are constantly shifting.

High turnover among staff and volunteers means a steady stream of newcomers for whom, unfortunately, the Tucson refugee service provider community appears to be a mass of confusion. In meetings and at workshops, participants are throwing around first names, website acronyms, place nicknames, and information from previous meetings. Until recently, there has been no centralized place or method to find all the information that the participants are indexing. On the surface, the community seems fragmented and almost impossible to negotiate and understand, posing great challenges to new interns, part-time or short-term volunteers, and the agencies that work with them. High turnover rates translate into gaps in or even complete absences of institutional memory. With neither extensive networks of returning providers nor extensive infrastructures for information dissemination, communication becomes stilted in broad areas, and channeled within the few long-term relationships among those who have managed to remain.

Identifying and Interacting with the Refugee Service Provider Community

While gathering data from the refugee service provider community to help create a directory of service providers in Tucson, BARA researchers experienced firsthand the challenges of identifying and contacting community members. The team began with the list of contacts shared at RISP-Net meetings, sent out a short email questionnaire to nearly 200 contacts, and made 46 follow-up phone calls. Three months after sending the questionnaire and making phone calls, the researchers had received only 25 entries for the database. Of the respondents, just six were from full time refugee-specific service providers. The rest came from organizations that served refugees
peripherally, as part of their general service populations. The reasons for the low response level were many, including outdated email addresses that were returned to the sender. A number of people on the original list claimed a University of Arizona affiliation. Many were likely to have been students involved in the refugee or refugee service community while attending the University, but most students leave the University within a few years. In addition, 20 phone calls failed to elicit any action because no one answered, the caller repeatedly received a busy signal, or the call simply did not go through.

Clearly, even when individuals are identified, maintaining communication with them is challenging. High turnover means that phone numbers, email addresses, and contact people change frequently, requiring active outreach to keep track of providers. In some cases, the phone number provided led to an individual who had been hired to replace the person whose name was on the contact list, but just as often the number belonged to someone no longer associated with the network. Exemplifying another problem, one respondent noted that she had already been contacted to provide information for a service-provider guidebook and did not want to be bothered again. High permanent and volunteer staff turnover affects long-term members of this community when efforts to create and maintain the community require those individuals to repeatedly identify and share information about themselves.

The small number of questionnaire responses may also reflect frustration on the part of the community with what appears to be yet another study that does not lead to constructive action. Given that many minor and major crises accompany refugee resettlement work, the questionnaire was likely to be perceived as fairly insignificant and the email, only one within a crowded inbox, could be easily overlooked. This justifiable frustration will be discussed further when considering the role of the University in the refugee service provider community. Here, the important point is that frustration stems from the eternal dilemma of all service organizations: balancing resources invested versus benefits received.

**Lack of Collective and Institutional Memory**

The difficulties that the BARA team had contacting a significant portion of the refugee service provider list, as well as the disparity of responses from agencies, point to several key issues facing the refugee service provider community. Some of these are very relevant even to the short-term volunteer. As noted, Tucson’s refugee and refugee service provider community is highly fractured. Collective memory, but especially institutional memory, is crucial to the functioning and continuity of any collective endeavor. High turnover, combined with the dispersion of information across numerous organizations and agencies, has meant that institutional memory among Tucson’s refugee service providers is rather ephemeral. Photos are scattered on temporary storage devices such as thumb drives that are easily lost. PowerPoint presentations, minutes, and training manuals are on computer hard drives that are easily corrupted. Notes are on papers that get buried under other papers. Experiences are stored in individuals’ minds, minds that tend to move on within a few years. In other words, ephemeral memory is problematic in a community with such a high turnover rate, but trying to achieve so much with so little. At a networking meeting in early 2011, for instance, discussion turned to the Refugee Integration and Service Provider Network (RISP-Net) Education Committee, which had been inactive for some time. Only one woman in the group seemed to remember the extent of the committee’s actions, and even she cast some doubt on her own memories. At the time, a group of providers was looking for a formal entity through which to organize an advisory board for a grant
proposal. In the end, since the Education Committee was not functioning, the group cast it aside in favor of more ad hoc invitations as deemed appropriate by the grant administrators.

A significant consequence of this lack of institutional memory, especially in times of serious resource constraints, is that individuals and agencies keep reinventing the wheel—or, rather, the education module, the volunteer guide, or apartment training guidelines. There is no easily accessible record of what has been done, and few individuals are able to maintain the long-term engagement necessary to remember accurately what has been achieved and when. The learning curve becomes steep for the newcomer when physical records of achievements no longer exist, requiring agencies already strapped for resources to expend even more energy training and troubleshooting the voluntary help they so heavily rely on.

Consequently, in order to access the information and work effectively and efficiently in the Tucson refugee community, a volunteer or intern must generally become deeply embedded within an agency or organization through continued, repeated, sometimes escalating responsibilities. Those with a more superficial relationship to the community will face difficulty. Likewise, unaware that many ideas have been tried before, often unsuccessfully, new arrivals make suggestions to develop projects and programs, which more experienced volunteers or interns greet with blank stares or even groans, dampening the new arrivals’ enthusiasm right from the start.

**Communication and Collaboration among Organizations**

Refugee service providers communicate frequently in many small but significant ways, from organizing the annual Refugee Health Fair to providing financial assistance to refugees in need. Still, this study highlights the very real effects of the drought of money and resources within the refugee and refugee service communities. Beyond RISP-Net meetings, there is no centralized forum for communication, making it difficult for organizations and agencies to find out what others are up to. Even within RISP-Net, participation varies considerably by the size and type of organization. When gathering data via the questionnaire described above, BARA researchers observed that they received responses only from individuals and organizations with the resources and the time to attend meetings and complete the questionnaire. A significant proportion of the respondents came from the Tucson Unified School District, the Tucson Police Department, the Pima County Public Libraries, the Pima County Health Department, the City of Tucson, and other governmental or private organizations not focused exclusively on refugees. In other words, most of the respondents came from organizations with less turnover, more job security, and higher pay.

Many individuals have attempted to overcome communication blocks, and various agencies do communicate amongst themselves, depending on their leadership and the interpersonal relationships that leaders maintain. Unfortunately, as in any group of organizations, the efficacy of communication depends on all parties having both the inclination and the resources to communicate consistently. Before BARA’s study began, for example, a small local service provider created a Google calendar for refugee events hoping that others in the community would adopt it to communicate about their upcoming events. At an RISP-Net meeting in March 2011, a staff member from that organization mentioned the calendar as a possibly useful component of a website that was being developed. The general consensus of the group was that this calendar was a positive contribution, yet it was clear that many of those present were generally surprised at its very existence.
RISP-Net was created to facilitate communication among organizations, and it has had some success. Though tensions exist among some organizations and some are particularly careful to protect their turfs, in principle no organization is explicitly opposed to communicating with other organizations. In some instances, the smaller organizations lack the personnel necessary for collecting information from the various organizations and agencies that would be necessary for creating a consistently collaborative atmosphere. Additionally, the structure of the formal refugee system creates a disincentive for communication and collaboration among VOLAGs. Each VOLAG strives to find jobs for a certain number of refugees. If they do not meet their quotas, they jeopardize their funding for refugee resettlement, in local offices and nationwide. Even if VOLAGs are not explicitly competing, their resources are often better spent in pursuit of meeting state and national goals rather than in collaborating with other local agencies. Doing so protects the VOLAGs as organizations, and, just as importantly, protects the refugees they serve.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1** Schematic illustrating effects of communication gaps in refugee resettlement  
Source: Spielhagen 2011

Figure 1 is a schematic that illustrates how, as one moves from the national to the state to the local level, cracks in communication inherent in any system become ever more significant. In ever smaller arenas of action and participation, groups have fewer and fewer resources to patch over these cracks until, as the fading arrow shows, those resources all but disappear at the level of the refugee. Many organizations use volunteers as important resources for filling those gaps and meeting short-term needs, but, for reasons discussed earlier, this strategy often exacerbates communication problems.

**The University of Arizona**
An important goal of BARA’s 2010-2011 study was to identify University of Arizona groups that work with refugees and refugee service providers. In conjunction with this goal, the research team aimed to explore the role BARA might play in helping to better coordinate efforts by all University participants to serve refugees and service providers in Tucson more efficiently and effectively. BARA researchers contacted faculty, students, and staff across campus to learn more about past and present involvement with refugees and refugee service providers. They also talked with representatives of VOLAGs, MAAs, and other service providers to find out whom they had worked with at the University.

A few University of Arizona units remain consistently involved in the refugee service provider community through the efforts of a few key individuals. Overall, however, the University, for all its resources and manpower, plays a very mixed role within the community, resulting in very mixed results and very mixed feelings. These feelings, despite the pressure they place on volunteers to “do all or nothing at all,” make it imperative for the newcomer to cultivate trust within the community.

University of Arizona participation in the Tucson refugee and refugee service provider communities varies tremendously between and even within units. Some units, such as the Honors College, maintain programs, such as Honors Civic Engagement Teams, whose express purpose is to participate in the refugee and refugee service provider communities. Other campus organizations, such as the Center for English as a Second Language, have sustained contact with immigrant and foreign students, many of them refugees, even though they are not expressly dedicated to participating in the refugee and service provider communities. In still other units, individuals work with these communities as Peace Corps Fellows or as independent volunteers.

Coordination of efforts was identified as a central challenge for faculty, staff, and students within the University as well as for those within the refugee community seeking to work with University students. Faculty in one school or department were not always aware that other faculty had students working in the refugee community, and there is no comprehensive record of the ways in which the University of Arizona currently interacts with the refugee and refugee service provider communities, let alone has interacted with them since the 1980s.

The research effort on the University of Arizona campus only reached a fraction of the individuals who work with refugees and service providers in Tucson. The effort to identify, bring together, and assess the goals and needs of those individuals and the programs within which they are working will continue during the 2011-2012 academic year.

Summary

Despite the many challenges discussed above, the refugee service provider community is remarkably successful in its endeavors, for even as it faces these hurdles, each individual organization generally manages to shuffle and manipulate its resources creatively in order to get valuable work done. Nevertheless, the national, state, and local developments discussed throughout this report have had a very real effect on how effectively service providers have been able to do their work and, thus, on refugees’ day-to-day struggles to get by.
These developments, including the acute shortage of money, have become roadblocks to communication, as not all agencies and organizations have the resources to coordinate with others. Another substantial difficulty facing the service provider community and hindering its capabilities is the lack of institutional memory, which has a significant effect on new employees and volunteers, who face a steep upward-sloping learning curve upon beginning their work. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that so many people working in these organizations are volunteers who, by the nature of their positions, will not stay as long as employees.

Thus, many Tucson service provider organizations consider volunteers, and especially University of Arizona students, as potentially helpful but often unreliable partners. A question constantly arises: Who really gains from volunteer work, the volunteer or the agency? Many VOLAG and MAA representatives believe that, ultimately, the volunteers gain more, particularly student volunteers. The refugee service provider organization has spent valuable time and resources to train the student, but often receives no tangible or sustainable product in return, while the student has received school credit, a line on her or his resume, or some other sort of reward. This perception suggests the need for improved communication about expectations on both sides and underscores that such discussions should become part of an ongoing process. Everyone wants to help, from the VOLAG, the MAA, or other refugee service provider to the volunteer. Yet student volunteers require a framework to become more accountable to service providers and refugees, as well as greater knowledge of the strain their involvement may place upon the communities they hope to help. Further information is needed to more clearly articulate the nature and extent of various groups’ commitments and to assist in better matching needs and expectations to refugee service delivery outcomes.
CHAPTER FOUR: EFFORTS TO ENHANCE INFORMATION SHARING

RISP-Net Website

To help address some of the difficulties in bridging cracks in communication among various participants in Tucson’s refugee resettlement activities, efforts have been underway for some time to develop and maintain a website through the Refugee Integration and Service Provider Network (RISP-Net) to consolidate both information about the Tucson refugee service provider community and to keep the community up-to-date on coalition developments. Until recently, website development has suffered because key individuals spearheading the effort lack time and resources. The website was launched in the summer of 2011. It remains to be seen whether it will be an effective mechanism for achieving these goals, and if it will be equally useful for larger as well as smaller agencies and refugees, too.

Meaningful Access

Language interpretation is a continual problem for refugees in Tucson. When analyzing this problem, two challenges rise above all others: a lack of qualified interpreters, and cultural and class bias among interpreters. These challenges persist across three main areas where BARA researchers observed that language interpretation was crucial in refugees’ interactions with other members of the Tucson community: public safety, landlords-tenant relations, and schools.

The Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) addresses this problem by maintaining a network of communication with other groups in the refugee service provider community. TUSD was recently required to overhaul its interpretation services and created Meaningful Access, an administrative unit responsible for processing all requests for interpretation, coordinating interpreter hiring and training, and maintaining transparent records of all language interpretation. Amazingly, TUSD Meaningful Access has only one full-time employee who is responsible for carrying out and overseeing all of the unit’s tasks and responsibilities. He has been successful because he is capable of “wearing many hats” and because he maintains communication with a network including the International Rescue Committee, the University of Arizona, and the courts in order to recruit new interpreters and share resources. Instead of solely recruiting individuals outside TUSD, he has focused on strengthening an in-house pool of interpreters by hiring teachers, counselors, and administrators from the ranks of TUSD’s full-time employees. By enhancing information sharing within TUSD and maintaining connections with others in the refugee service community, Meaningful Access has improved one facet of the interpretation problem for Tucson’s refugee population.

The Volunteer Resource Guide

The Tucson Volunteer Resource Guide (Hayes, Gray, and Woronov 2010) was first compiled in 2009-2010 by former BARA faculty member, Dr. Terry Woronov, and a graduate student working with BARA’s Tucson Refugee Project. Lauren Hayes, the student, had spoken with interns working with refugee families and realized that much of the information that other volunteers might need was scattered among many different sources. After speaking with refugee
service providers and teachers, she realized that while each agency handed out its own tip sheet, a cross-agency guide would be beneficial. She began to work with Cherie Gray, the director of the Tucson Refugee Ministry, who had also been thinking of producing a single reference guide combining information related to the resettlement process with information that might help volunteers assist refugees. They compiled information from interviews with refugee service providers, agency tip sheets, and other resources. The guide includes two sections on resettlement and resettlement agencies, and an additional ten sections about important topics, such as what volunteers can do after refugees arrive, services and assistance, money and banking, housing, transportation, learning English, employment and job training, medical care, immigration and green cards, and education. All of these sections were designed to collate information that volunteers might otherwise have to spend time searching for. The guide was intended purely as reference, not as a set of instructions for resettlement, and it suggests that volunteers get in contact with their agencies should they have any questions. The guide was shared with and reviewed by a broad array of service providers and others involved in Tucson’s refugee community and revised several times. It was first published in the spring of 2010 and distributed in both electronic and paper formats.

After learning how many members of Tucson’s refugee service provider community had changed their contact information during 2010-2011, a group of BARA interns decided to see how much the volunteer resource guide had changed. Lauren Hayes, who had initially compiled the guide, was no longer working on the project, and was available for only periodic consultation. Therefore, the interns first went through the guide to determine where she had gotten the information, and then developed a strategy to update the guide. Information for ten of the twelve sections had changed in the year since it had been developed.

Taking into account how much had changed in such a short time, the interns recommended that the guide be updated annually. To expedite the process, the interns created a checklist of potential changes and where the updated information could be found (see Appendix A). Using the checklist, updating the guide should take about two or three hours. BARA interns will update the guide each year, so that it will continue to provide useful information to volunteers working with the refugee community.

A copy of the guide can be found at the Tucson Refugee Ministry website at http://tucsonrefugeeministry.com/images/stories/PDFs/volunteerresourceguide.zip. Electronic and print copies can also be obtained by contacting BARA.

**Refugee 101 Trainings**

There are multiple Refugee 101 training workshops in Tucson. An important one is an all-agency training designed under the leadership of International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Lutheran Social Services of the South West (LSS-SW). Various VOLAGs and MAAs are tailoring the training to their own specific needs to increase its accessibility and usefulness. The IRC, LSS-SW, Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona (CCS-SOAZ), Iskashitaa Refugee Harvesting Network, and Tucson Refugee Ministry have effectively used and/or are using this training for their potential volunteers.
Jean McClelland of the University of Arizona’s College of Public Health has also organized a refugee health training workshop. Developed collaboratively by members of the Refugee Primary Care Work Group, this Refugee 101 workshop is geared specifically toward healthcare providers. The work group has a “speakers’ bureau,” which includes providers, resettlement agency reps, and other volunteers. These volunteers take the training PowerPoint and present it on request, with whatever modifications the audience and time frame may require. The work is mostly done by volunteers or by members of the different participating agencies as part of their outreach. Following an explanation of how refugees differ from other immigrants or entrants, the workshop presents an overview of the refugee groups resettled to Tucson, the agencies serving them, and the services available to people holding refugee status, as well as the predominant health challenges they face and their difficulties obtaining access to services. This training can possibly include examples of specific strategies that have been used to address challenges and improve the refugees’ understanding of the U.S. health model.

Fostering Greater Coordination of University of Arizona Efforts

Two immediate needs identified by the BARA student research team regarding University of Arizona’s involvement in Tucson’s refugee and refugee service provider communities will be addressed in the fall of 2011. First, many students become involved in work with refugees through classes, clubs, and internships, and only a small number of those individuals participate in the trainings offered by the VOLAGs, MAAs, and other organizations. To increase the knowledge available to UA faculty, staff, and students, BARA and the College of Public Health have begun collaborating with refugees and refugee service providers to adapt the Refugee 101 training and offer it as a half-day workshop on campus. Aside from covering the basics of refugee resettlement and Tucson’s refugee community, this workshop will provide information about community service learning and best practices for students and faculty seeking to provide meaningful service to the community from which they are learning. Graduate students working on the adapted workshop will develop and implement an evaluation to assess its immediate and longer-term effectiveness for addressing knowledge gaps. The workshop will also provide a forum to attract members of the University community who have already been working with refugees as well as those who are interested in doing so and thereby contribute to BARA’s ongoing effort to gather information about this community and help coordinate its efforts.

BARA interns will also develop a website aimed at bringing University of Arizona individuals, units, and organizations together with members of Tucson’s refugee and refugee service provider communities. Modeled on other websites that match volunteers and those in need of services, the University website will also serve as a repository for information. Students working on the website will develop and implement an evaluation of the website’s effectiveness in bringing people together and, based on the evaluation’s results, they will revise the site.

Suggestions for the Future

- Government funded refugee resettlement agencies, and public agencies such as TUSD, TPD, and Pima Community College, should share resources (e.g., learning materials, interpreters, and best practices). Numerous times during the course of the 2010-2011 fieldwork, interviewees expressed open hostility toward the approaches, ideologies,
and/or methodologies utilized by their colleagues or counterparts in other agencies. Although approaches to refugee resettlement vary, all agencies and organization are, or should be, working toward a common goal: facilitating the integration, empowerment, and self-sufficiency of refugee communities.

- Resettlement and publicly funded agencies alike should work together to develop a more substantial course or orientation to American culture for refugees. Doing so has the potential to prevent many of the most nagging and enduring problems that prevent integration, empowerment, and self-sufficiency in refugee communities. This course/orientation should incorporate materials and activities designed specifically for refugee youth.

- BARA researchers should investigate the potential for an accredited interpretation training program for qualified and motivated refugees. If properly funded, the program could provide interpretation training for free or at a discount in exchange for a mandatory service period following completion of training. This would not only create jobs for refugees and instructors, but also increase the number of qualified interpreters. Similar programs have failed in the past because graduates left Tucson for better jobs immediately after completing their training. Requiring a mandatory service period could redress this shortcoming.

- BARA researchers should investigate the potential for a class or workshop at the University of Arizona (through BARA, perhaps) educating would-be volunteers about the particular challenges of working with refugees in Tucson. The instructor(s) might encourage students to complete course projects to investigate and propose solutions for perennial problems, such as limited institutional memory in refugee service provider agencies and organizations, high staff burnout rates, and unsustainable project goals.
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Appendix A: Volunteer Resource Guide Update Checklist

I. Introduction

☐ Definition of “refugee” – www.unhcr.org

☐ World refugee statistics – www.unhcr.org

☐ U.S. refugee statistics – www.state.gov/g/prm/


☐ Transportation from home country – www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp

☐ Contact info LSS – www.lss-sw.org/

☐ Contact info CCS – www.ccs-soaz.org

☐ Contact info IRC in Tucson – www.rescue.org/us-program/us-tucson-az

☐ Contact info Arizona refugee coordinator – www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/state_coordina.htm

II. Responsibilities of Refugee Resettlement Agencies

☐ Provisions agencies must fulfill in accordance with federal government – http://www.state.gov/g/prm/

III. Opportunities for Volunteers – first 30 days

☐ Location and phone number of international markets – google “international markets Tucson” and check following markets by googling them or checking a phonebook: Caravan Middle Eastern Food Store, Jerusalem Market, Somer International Market, Jasmine’s Market, Nur Import Market, Grantstone Asian Market, Lee Lee’s Oriental Supermarket, Babylon Market

☐ Telephone Assistance Program – call (602) 542-6600 or go to http://arizonaselfhelp.org

☐ Do not call registry number – www.donotcall.gov


IV. Services and Assistance

☐ Services of the Reception and Placement Program – www.state.gov/g/prm
Matching Grant Program – www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs(match_grant_prg.htm
Eligibility and what to bring to WIC – www.azwic.gov/eligibility.htm
TANF eligibility – www.nccp.org/profiles/AZ_profile_36.html
TPEP eligibility – www.azlawhelp.org
Foodstamps eligibility and procedure – www.azdes.gov/nutrition_assistance/
Fax and phone of FAA (Foodstamps/Nutrition Assistance) district offices – https://app.azdes.gov/faa/location.asp
Pima County Community Services contact info – site not updated, google and call
Tucson Urban League contact info – not on site, google and call
Salvation Army Family Services – site not updated, google and call
Interfaith Community Services contact info – www.icstucson.org/contacts.htm

V. Money and Banking
Price of money orders (over the long run) – google or call a bank

VI. Housing
Website for Landlord Tenant Laws – www.keytlaw.com/leasinglaw/leasinglaw.htm
Family Housing Resources contact info – http://familyhousingresources.com/contact.html
Habitat for Humanity contact info – www.habitattucson.org
Primavera Foundation contact info – www.primavera.org/html/contact.html

VII. Transportation
Bicas info – www.bicas.org
TIARC driver’s ed info – website unreliable, call 881-4404

Fire Department car seat site – make sure it still works

Arizona Baptist Children’s Services contact info – www.abcs.org/about-us/contact-us

Crisis Pregnancy Center contact info – http://wpctucson.com/

MVD website – make sure it still works


VIII. Learning English

Pima Adult Education Center contact info – www.pima.edu/adulted/locations.shtml

Refugee Education Project info – www.pima.edu/adulted/programs/special.shtml

Pima County Library websites – make sure they work

Tucson Refugee Ministry contact info – http://tucsonrefugeeministry.com/

Literacy Volunteers of Tucson contact info – www.lovetoread.org

Catalina Methodist Church info – http://catumc.org, check given website too

SBATA contact info – www.sbata.org, check given website too

IX. Employment and Job Training Resources

Services provided by Arbor – www.arboret.com

Matching Grant Program eligibility – see section IV

RCA eligibility – see section IV

TANF eligibility – see section IV

TPEP eligibility – see section IV

Pima County Public Library website – make sure it works, see section VIII

Martha Cooper Branch address and website – www.library.pima.gov/locations/marthacooper/index.php
World Care contact info – www.worldcare.org/contact.html

X. Medical Care


AHCCCS info - www.azahcccs.gov

Phone of FAA district offices (Barbara and Yasmin) – see section IV

UMC and urgent care addresses and phone numbers – www.azumc.com

TMC and urgent care addresses and phone numbers – www.tmcaz.com

St. Joseph’s Hospital address and phone number – www.carondelet.org/home/hospitals-locations/st-josephs-hospital.aspx

St. Elizabeth’s website – check that it works

Tucson Birth and Women’s Health Center info – www.tucsonbirthcenter.org/

XI. Immigration and Green Cards

USCIS website – make sure it works

Info and forms for green cards - http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=4886a6c515083210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=4886a6c515083210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD

Civil Surgeon website – make sure it works

Selective Service website – make sure it works

XII. Schools

AZELLA – www.ade.az.gov/oelas/

Catalina High School Wellness Center contact info - http://www.tusd.k12.az.us/contents/depart/interscholastics/exam.asp