New Neighbors, New Opportunities

Immigrants and Refugees in Grand Rapids

Dyer-Ives Foundation
Grand Rapids, Michigan
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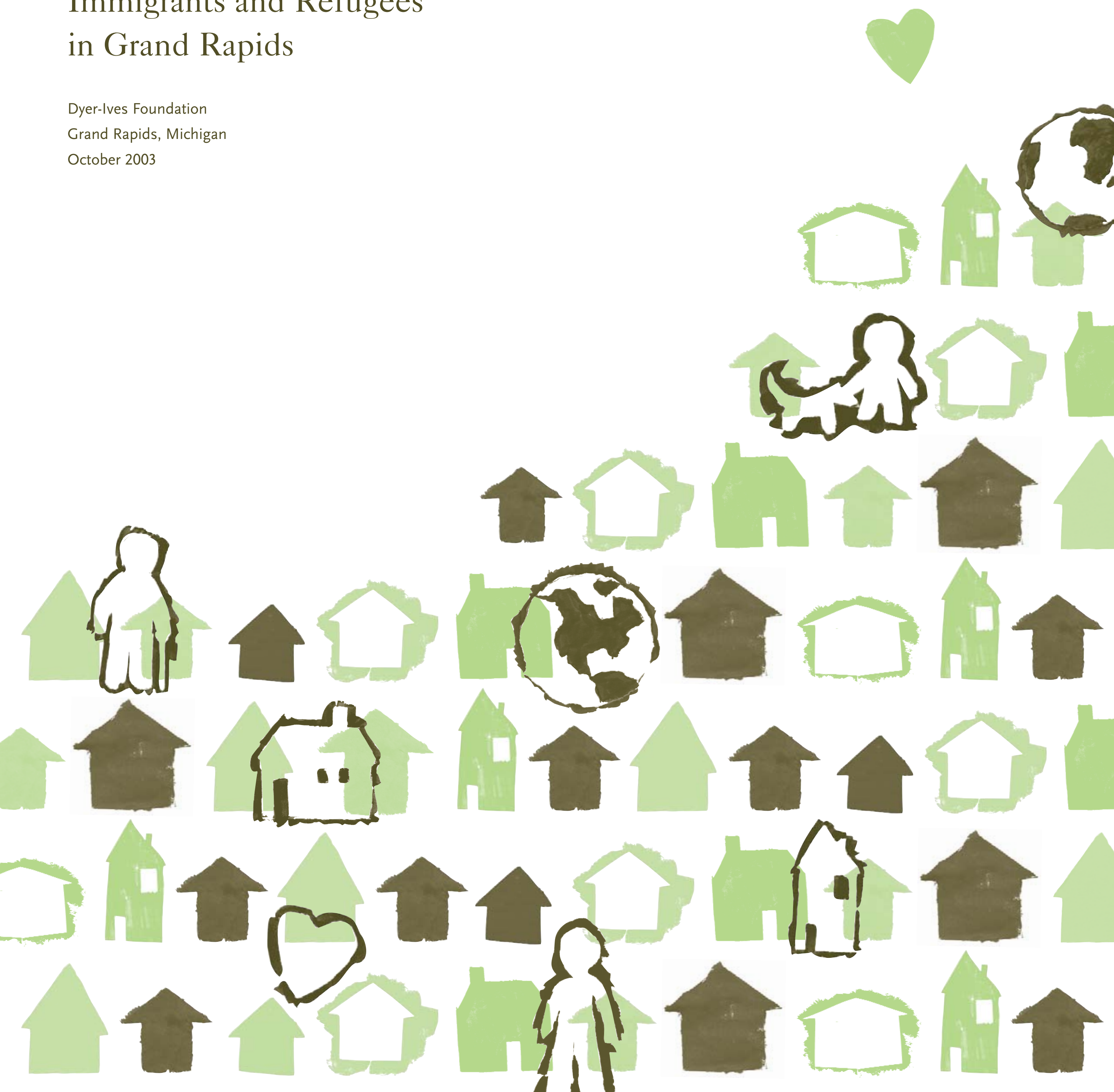

Mission

The Dyer-Ives Foundation was established in 1961 as a private charitable organization which makes grants to support social, educational, environmental, and cultural initiatives that build a sense of community, primarily within the central city of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Acknowledgements

The seed for this project was planted in early 2002, when we had the good fortune to discover, in the new books section of the Grand Rapids Public Library, Mary Pipher's immensely thoughtful and thought-provoking book, *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town*. We were struck by Pipher's insightful analysis of the challenges that refugees face in their efforts to resettle in the United States – so much so that we responded to a local refugee-serving agency's request for volunteer mentors (in Pipher's words, "cultural brokers").

Our subsequent exposure to the myriad issues that confront refugees and immigrants in Grand Rapids led to the desire to be involved in systems change related to newcomer issues. We are grateful that Dyer-Ives Foundation embraced the idea of a project aimed at raising awareness of the contributions that newcomers make to our community, the ways in which we as a community support their resettlement efforts, and the possibilities for more effectively leveraging the assets of newcomers.

We thank the many individuals and organizations who provided both information and inspiration for this report. We are especially grateful to the following local organizations for their tireless efforts in providing services for newcomers and for their generosity in sharing their time and resources in support of this project.

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Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

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In developing this report, we have benefited from – and been significantly influenced by – a variety of initiatives in other communities, as well as efforts of national and international organizations. We appreciate their valuable contributions in support of immigrants and refugees.

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Finally, we express our heartfelt thanks to Akot Rieth and Juba Rieth, whose life journey has brought them from Sudan to Grand Rapids and whose friendship has enriched our lives beyond words.

Foreword

Supporting community building is the hallmark of Dyer-Ives Foundation's work. Much of this work takes the form of strengthening neighborhood associations and other grassroots organizations – through funding, training and other capacity-building support. Sometimes the work focuses on the physical environment – supporting a neighborhood group seeking to create a new playground, restore a landmark building, explore the feasibility of a building project, or engage in neighborhood planning.

Sometimes Dyer-Ives' role is to help foster increased understanding of the changing dynamics of our community – from demographic trends to political realities. *New Neighbors, New Opportunities: Immigrants and Refugees in Grand Rapids* is a reflection of this role. The aim of this report is to help our community better understand the important role that immigrants and refugees play in Grand Rapids.

History tells us that fear of the unknown and resistance to change are deeply rooted in our culture, often hindering us from recognizing and embracing new opportunities. Thus the paradox: although the vast majority of Americans come from immigrant backgrounds, we have often viewed immigrant and refugee newcomers to the U.S. with a mixture of suspicion and fear, as evidenced by anti-immigrant attitudes, behaviors and laws.

The aim of this report is not to rehash old arguments about immigration-related issues but to present a new perspective that is gaining increasing attention around the country: the view that newcomers can play a critical role in community building. With this perspective as a framework, this report also explores the newcomer situation as it relates specifically to Grand Rapids: Is there a significant movement of immigrants and refugees into the community? How does our community support integration of these new neighbors? Are there opportunities to strengthen our systems of support to more effectively leverage the assets that immigrants and refugees bring?

New Neighbors, New Opportunities: Immigrants and Refugees in Grand Rapids represents the findings of research exploring both the local situation and innovative work in other communities around the country. The report is organized in six key sections:

New Neighbors, New Opportunities offers an introductory look at the growing local community of immigrants and refugees, and the challenges that confront both the newcomers and the community in supporting immigrants and refugees' efforts to become contributing members of their new community.

Newcomer Contributions to Community Vitality explores the often-overlooked role that immigrants and refugees play in strengthening communities. This role encompasses not only maintaining the population base in metropolitan areas and enriching the cultural fabric but also driving economic growth through labor supply, market creation, and new business development.

The Complex and Dynamic Process of Integration explains how immigrants and refugees become acculturated to their new environments, and introduces the concept of integration as a two-way street, involving adaptation by both newcomers and the communities receiving them.

Supporting Newcomer Integration offers a framework for understanding the primary categories of newcomer integration services and an overview of local agency roles in supporting newcomer integration in Grand Rapids.

Strengthening the Community's System of Support identifies three key areas for building on existing resources in Grand Rapids and on the experiences of other communities:

- Strengthening newcomer-focused organizations and programs
- Building the capacity of mainstream organizations to more effectively support newcomers
- Involving the broader community.

Moving Forward suggests promising directions for seizing opportunities to build a better local system of support for integrating immigrants and refugees into the community.

For those who wish to know more, the Appendix provides additional background on a variety of topics related to immigrants and refugees. Several of the items in the Appendix relate specifically to Grand Rapids:

- **The Numbers: Grand Rapids Residents Born Outside the U.S.** draws on U.S. census data to provide a statistical picture of the local foreign-born population.
- **A Sampling of Newcomer Resources in Grand Rapids** offers a list of local refugee resettlement agencies, refugee and immigrant service providers, English as a Second Language providers, interpretation and translation resources, coalition and networking groups, and mutual assistance associations.

- **From Oppression to Opportunity: The Long Journey of the Somali Bantu** provides background information about the Somali Bantu refugees arriving in Grand Rapids after a decade in African refugee camps.

Broader immigrant and refugee themes – from an historical perspective on paradoxical attitudes toward newcomers in the U.S. to an overview of key immigrant- and refugee supporting-initiatives – are addressed in documents in the Appendix:

- **U.S. Immigration Patterns** explores countries of origin, reasons for coming, and settlement locations of immigrants to the U.S.
- **An American Paradox: Immigrant Nation, Anti-Immigrant Backlash** examines the ambivalent, complex and varied nature of U.S. attitudes toward immigrants throughout the country's history.
- **From Newcomers to New Americans: The Successful Integration of Immigrants into American Society** reports on patterns of language acquisition, home ownership and other indicators of integration by newcomers.
- **A Sampling of Newcomer Initiatives and Resources in the U.S. and Canada** provides an overview of notable immigrant and refugee-supporting efforts, including funder initiatives, a television series, and a variety of studies and reports.

This report is only a beginning. We hope it will be helpful for a wide variety of community organizations, including social service and health care agencies, schools, neighborhood associations, governmental units, and funders, as well as immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies. Most of all, we hope it will provide a platform for raising awareness and initiating a dialogue that can lead to both short- and long-term responses that enable Grand Rapids and West Michigan to leverage the talents and capabilities of our new neighbors to build a better future for us all.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY AND SOURCES

The term *immigrant* refers to a person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another. *Refugees*, as defined by the United Nations, are people who flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution.

In the main body of the report, sources of information are listed in parentheses in the text. Additional details about sources are included in the alphabetical listing in Sources Consulted, page 44. In the Appendix, sources are indicated at the end of each individual document.

New Neighbors, New Opportunities

Grand Rapids is in the fortunate position of becoming home to a growing community of recently-arrived immigrants and refugees. Statistics help to tell the story:

- More than 10 percent of the city's population – nearly 21,000 people – were born outside the United States.
- Sixty-two percent of these newcomers – 13,300 people – arrived in the U.S. since 1990.
- One in six residents of the city of Grand Rapids aged five or older speaks a language other than English at home.
- Six thousand students in the Grand Rapids public schools speak English a second language.

Similar patterns can be seen in Kent County and the Grand Rapids-Holland-Muskegon area (see "The Numbers: Grand Rapids Residents Born Outside the U.S.," page 32).

The significance of Grand Rapids' growing immigrant populations is reflected in citations in two recent studies, one focusing on immigrants in the Midwest and the other on Latino population growth in the U.S.

- Grand Rapids is one of many Midwestern cities "not typically associated with immigration" [because they are not the traditional "gateway" cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Chicago] which have seen significant growth in immigrant populations, according to *Immigrants of the Heartland: How Immigration Is Revitalizing America's Midwest.* Prepared by the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, the report indicates that in more than one third of Midwestern counties, immigration represents 75+ percent of overall population growth – or population growth in areas where the overall population declined (Paral, page ii). Census statistics confirm that without the influx of immigrants in the past decade the population of Grand Rapids would have declined.
- The Grand Rapids metropolitan area is one of 50 "new Latino destinations" – metropolitan areas characterized by explosive growth in the Latino community – in the U.S., according to *Latino Growth in Metropolitan America: Changing Patterns, New Locations,* a recent Brookings Institution study. The report indicates that the Latino population in the central city of Grand Rapids tripled between 1990 and 2000 (Suro, page 15).

While Latinos account for the largest percentage of recently-arrived immigrants and refugees in Grand Rapids, the newcomers arrive here from many areas of the world: 60 percent from Latin America; 16 percent from Europe; 15 percent from Asia; and the remainder from the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the

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world. They range from medical professionals to young children who have lost their entire families to war.

These newcomers bring a wealth of assets – from professional degrees to the ability to overcome obstacles that most of us would consider insurmountable. And, in their efforts to build new lives and establish themselves as contributing members of their communities, our new neighbors face daunting challenges: learning a new language, gaining competence in a new culture, negotiating unfamiliar systems, finding employment, healing from trauma.

At the same time, Grand Rapids also faces a challenge: how can we effectively support newcomers in becoming self-sufficient members of the community? One starting point for addressing this challenge is educating ourselves – starting with learning about the contributions immigrant and refugee newcomers make to the vitality of our community.

Newcomer Contributions to Community Vitality

West Michigan is changing and is beginning to reflect the diversity of the world around us. Our communities have made efforts to deal with racial and ethnic intolerance but we need to do more to take advantage of the benefits associated with a diverse population.

The strength and vitality of our Tri-plex [the greater Grand Rapids, Holland, and Muskegon area] will be determined by our ability to understand and embrace different ethnic, religious and socio-economic perspectives. We will build stronger communities if we can tie our mutual well-being to one another.

Michael Gallis and Associates
West Michigan: A Region in Transition
West Michigan Strategic Alliance,
2002, p. 26.

Communities and regions throughout the country are forming coalitions like the West Michigan Strategic Alliance to improve their communities' quality of life and enhance their ability to compete in the 21st century. They're looking at job growth, new business development and wealth creation; environmental issues and transportation systems; ways of revitalizing urban centers and enhancing the cultural and social life of their communities. As in West Michigan, forward-looking planners, economic developers and community activists have begun to recognize the key role played by newcomers – immigrants and refugees – in jut about every strategy for building strong communities.

For example, between 1990 and 2000, the population base of the city of Grand Rapids would have eroded without an influx of immigrants: the city lost nearly 4,600 residents but gained more than 13,000 newcomers from around the world. Thirty percent of Kent County's population growth and nearly 20 percent of the Grand Rapids-Holland-Muskegon area population growth in the last decade is due to immigration (U.S. Census Bureau).

These newcomers have the potential to contribute to the health and prosperity of our community in numerous ways. A recent Ernst & Young study of immigration indicates that "Immigration will be a key driver of economic growth…The newcomers and their offspring will purchase homes, rent apartments, buy consumer goods and services, save and invest capital, start domestic businesses, recruit managers and employees, provide a source of labor, and enroll in trade schools, community colleges and universities" (Ernst & Young, page 11). The study elaborates on these impacts:

- **Home Ownership**
  Many immigrants place a high priority on home ownership, purchasing their first home as soon as they can save for a down payment – generally about 10 years after their arrival in the U.S. According to the Fannie Mae Foundation, the number of immigrant homeowners nationally will increase by 2.2 million between 1995 and 2010 – offsetting the anticipated lower demand for home

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Ernst & Young, page 11

ownership of the "echo boomers," the children of baby boomers (Ernst & Young, page 9). In fact, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress "The underlying demand for new housing units has received support from an expanding population, in part resulting from high levels of immigration" (Shook, 2002). This suggests that, given the influx of more than 13,000 newcomers in the 1990s, Grand Rapids could experience a housing market "boom" in the next decade.

- **Urban Neighborhoods**
  "Immigrants are creating vibrant communities... [and] have revitalized once-blighted neighbor-hoods," the Ernst & Young study claims. Newcomers tend to cluster in ethnic communities, seeking the support of families, friends and other immigrants as they make the transition to American life. They are commonly attracted to the affordable prices of properties in what are perceived as "disadvantaged" areas of the city, and soon buy homes, start businesses, establish community centers, and enjoy the benefit of rising property values. The study cites the case of the Vietnamese in Chicago's north side along Argyle Street, Russians in Brooklyn's Brighton Beach, and Hispanics in Washington D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood as examples of this trend (Ernst & Young, page 3). In Grand Rapids, we see examples of such revitalization in areas such as Grandville Avenue, with its flourishing Hispanic-owned shops and restaurants, and South Division Avenue between 28th and 44th Streets, where a variety of Asian-owned businesses have been created.

- **New Business Development**
  The kind of spirit that drives newcomers to leave their home countries and risk everything to begin again in America translates easily into entrepreneurial initiative. For example, the Pico-Union area west of downtown Los Angeles represents the highest rate of new business formations in Los Angeles county despite the relatively low average incomes of the largely immigrant Latino community (Ernst & Young, p.11). Newcomers traditionally open businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores, but today they are also starting construction companies, travel agencies, car services, beauty salons, mini-marts, and a wide range of other enterprises.

- **Global Competitiveness**
  "Some immigrants are using their links to their home countries to start new businesses," according to the Ernst & Young study (page 10). For example, after the economic collapse of the oil and gas industry in the 1980s, the city of Houston lost one out of seven jobs in just five years, and many former oil and gas industry employees moved away. Yet, the city has transformed its economy, partially by leveraging the influx of new immigrants, whose numbers more than doubled from 1980 to 1990. Houston

has positioned itself as the "gateway to Latin America" and is now the second largest port in America, with an estimated one-third of all jobs now related to international trade. "It is an enormous asset to have Hispanic Houstonians, Asian Houstonians, Black Houstonians in positions of economic and political leadership to build the connections to the global economy," according to Stephen Klineberg, who has been tracking demographic and economic change in Houston for the last 20 years (The National Immigration Forum, 1997, page 3).

- **New Market Development**
  The Ernst & Young study points to the myriad opportunities for U.S. businesses to expand their markets to address the needs of newcomers – ranging from investments in venture capital resources for immigrant-owned businesses and new mortgage products specifically targeting newcomers to participating in the evolving market for ethnically themed entertainment, recreational and retail facilities.

This is not the portrayal of immigration that we are accustomed to seeing, with much public discussion focusing on the perceived threat of immigration and an array of myths about its negative effects. Yet, according to the Urban Institute, study after study of the impact of immigration on communities has concluded, "the economic effects of immigration are largely positive."

Addressing common misconceptions, the Urban Institute summarizes the findings of years of research studies:

- Overall, immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in public services.
- Average household incomes of legal and refugee immigrant households rise with time in the U.S. and surpass those of natives after ten years in this country.
- Immigrants generate more jobs than they take. Native job loss to immigrants is limited to labor markets where the economy is slack and immigrants are concentrated.
- Recent immigrants are substantially less likely to be on welfare than are natives.
- Welfare use among immigrants is concentrated among refugees and the elderly.

(Fix, Zimmerman and Passel, pages 35-37)

In a recent article, "The Rise of the Creative Class," economic development guru Richard Florida makes an intriguing argument for the contributions of newcomers to the vitality of our communities. Florida points to the "creative class" – people who "share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference and merit" – as the kind of talent in

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Welfare use among immigrants is concentrated among refugees and the elderly.

Fix, Zimmerman and Passel, pages 35-37

highest demand by more and more businesses (Florida, page 3). "Most civic leaders, however," Florida says, "have failed to understand that what is true for corporations is also true for cities and regions: Places that succeed in attracting and retaining creative class people prosper; those that fail don't" (Florida, page 4).

Leading edge businesses will seek to locate in communities that are attractive to this creative class, Florida says – communities that accept newcomers quickly and welcome creativity. Most of all, destination communities must be diverse: "Creative-minded people enjoy a mix of influences. They want to hear different kinds of music and try different kinds of food. They want to meet and socialize with people unlike themselves, trade views and spar over issues," Florida says (Florida, page 8). For smaller cities and regions, not historically noted for their diverse populations, an openness to immigration can be the key to attracting the kind of people who are a critical engine of economic growth.

Growing awareness of the positive impact of immigrants has spawned creative approaches to attract newcomers. For example, the mayor of Schenectady, New York, has traveled to New York City to urge Guyanese immigrants there to join other Guyanese who have moved to Schenectady, fixed up abandoned homes, and filled entry-level jobs in nursing homes (Armas, page C8). And Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack has proposed an "immigrant enterprise zone" to enable Iowa to attract needed workers (Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights and Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, page 3).

In The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town, psychologist Mary Pipher makes the case that, by their example, newcomers prepare us for life in a global society. Newcomers, she says, "offer us a heightened version of the experiences we'll all share as our world becomes one vast fusion culture." The coping skills that newcomers demonstrate – flexibility, resiliency, composure in the midst of rapid change, the ability to deal with people different from ourselves – are the skills we will all need in a global society, she says (Pipher, page 22).

While newcomers may be the harbingers of our common future, both Pipher and Schenectady Mayor Al Jurczynski remind us that newcomers also put us in touch with the best qualities of our common history. "They view Schenectady not as a tired, worn-out industrial city, they view it as a beautiful city with tremendous potential," says Jurczynski (Armas, page C8).

In their journeys from their home countries to the U.S., many have endured unspeakable hardship, Pipher says, but they arrive on our shores "the biggest believers in the American dream..."

They live in an irony-free zone. They want a house, a car, a stereo system, and a dishwasher. In our strange and difficult times, one reason the American dream stays alive is that new people keep showing up who believe in it. And, because they believe that America is the land of freedom and opportunity and because they act on that belief, they sometimes make it true. As Willa Cather once wrote, "The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman."

Pipher, page 329

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The Complex and Dynamic Process of Integration

"If you come to a country where everyone has only one eye, you have to take out one of your eyes so that you can fit in. Integration is THAT painful."

Response to the question, "What is integration like?" by a Somali woman resettling in Canada, Canadian Council for Refugees, page 10

Some newcomers come to the U.S. as students; some come as corporate executives or medical specialists; some come as farm laborers and some are fleeing the relentless horrors of war, persecution and genocide. Some possess a flawless command of English and others speak dialects known only in very small parts of the world. Some come as families, but many arrive alone, separated from families and friends. Their belief systems encompass a variety of spiritual practices, including Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and animistic. Newcomers are diverse in every way, but they all share – to some degree – the pain of accommodating to a new culture. We call this experience of acculturation "integration" and, not surprisingly, it's a complex and dynamic process.

Many terms – including settlement, resettlement, adaptation, adjustment and integration – have been used to describe how newcomers become part of a community. The United Nations Economic and Social Council has defined this experience as:

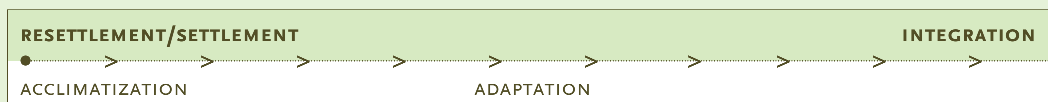
> *a gradual process by which new residents become active participants in the economic, social, civic, cultural and spiritual affairs of a new homeland. It is a dynamic process in which values are enriched through mutual acquaintance, accommodation and understanding. It is a process in which both the migrant and their compatriots find an opportunity to make their own distinctive contributions. (Canadian Council for Refugees, pages 6-7).*

THE INTEGRATION CONTINUUM

The Canadian Council for Refugees views the integration process as a continuum (see chart below).

Settlement is relatively short-term. It involves acclimatization and the early stages of adaptation, when newcomers make the basic adjustments to life in a new country, including finding a place to live, beginning to learn the local language, getting a job, and learning how to get around in an unfamiliar environment.

Integration refers to the longer-term process through which newcomers become full and equal participants in all the various dimensions of society.



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Response to the question, "What is integration like?" by a Somali woman resettling in Canada, Canadian Council for Refugees, page 10

INDICATORS OF SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

Settlement and integration involve a series of choices for the newcomer and the community – in the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres. Based on their research and experience, the Canadian Council for Refugees has begun to identify examples of indicators that might be used to evaluate newcomers' and society's level of integration:

SPHERE	SHORT-TERM (SETTLEMENT)	LONGER-TERM (INTEGRATION)
Economic	Entering job market Financial independence	Career advancement Income parity Entry into field of prior employment
Social	Established social network Diversity within social network	Accessing institutions Engaging in efforts to change institutions
Cultural	Adaptation of various aspects of lifestyle (e.g., diet, family relationships)	Engaging in efforts to redefine cultural identity Adapting or reassessing values
Political	Citizenship Voting	Participation in political parties Participation in socio-political movements

The rate of an individual's integration may vary from one sphere to another: a newcomer may adapt quickly to the expectations of the workplace, but may find it more challenging to acculturate socially. And the degree of adaptation in each sphere tends to impact all of the others; for example, at some point the challenges a newcomer faces in terms of adapting to the new country's social expectations may impact his/her ability to advance in the workplace.

Of course, integration is, to some degree, a lifelong process for everyone – immigrants and non-immigrants alike. And indicators – such as full utilization of skills or political participation – vary considerably from person to person; they also vary over time for each individual (Canadian Council for Refugees, page 9).

THE COMMUNITY'S ROLE

In an effort to identify and foster the elements of successful integration, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement recently funded Building the New American Community, a three-year initiative involving a collaboration of four national organizations – the Migration Policy Institute, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Immigration Forum, and the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center. The project is a response to the increasing diversity of immigrants and refugees in the U.S., recent settlement patterns in "nontraditional" receiving communities (i.e., communities other than the traditional large metropolitan "gateway" cities for immigrants, such as New York, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles), and the devolution of responsibility for refugee and immigrant support services from the federal government to state and local governments (National Conference of State Legislatures, A collaborative project, page 1).

Among the principles underlying the project's concept of successful integration is the notion that integration is a two-way process that benefits both newcomers and the receiving community. The goals of integration are twofold: To better enable newcomers to become full and equal participants in America and to better enable communities to successfully incorporate immigrants and refugees (National Immigration Forum, Center for the New American Community, page 1).

INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY RECEPTIVITY

Building on this concept of integration as a two-way street, the Building the New American Community collaborators identified indicators of a community's receptivity to newcomers – ways in which they are adapting to growing immigration and refugee resettlement:

- Availability of interpreters/translators at public agencies
- Translations of public agency materials and signs
- Existence and strength of refugee or immigrant-run community organizations
- Existence and influence of task forces on newcomers and immigration
- Professional development focused on New American students in schools
- Availability of foreign-language materials in public libraries
- Extent to which newcomers have access to non-refugee/immigrant specific services
- Extent to which service providers reach out/ recruit newcomers
- Extent to which the leadership of public agencies is involved in refugee and immigrant integration issues

"Integration should be a two-way street, considering both the adaptations made by New Americans as well as the receptivity of refugee- and immigrant-receiving communities."

"Selected Integration Indicators," Building the New American Community, National Conference of State Legislators, page 1

- Extent to which newcomers are involved in the management/planning/design of services
- Newcomer involvement on the boards of influential agencies
- Extent to which newcomers are involved at a substantive level in public policy and decision-making roles

(National Conference of State Legislators, Selected integration indicators, pages 1-2.)

Gaining a deeper understanding of the integration process – the role of the individual and the role of the community – can guide us as we seek to create a more compassionate and a more prosperous community. It's through the lens of integration that we can assess the strengths and shortcomings of Grand Rapids' present system of support for newcomers and identify promising directions for strengthening the system.

Supporting Newcomer Integration

What kind of system of support do we have in Grand Rapids for new immigrants and refugees? While there are a variety of ways of conceptualizing elements of a newcomer integration support system, one useful framework comes from the Canadian Council for Refugees, including four primary categories of services:

- Services to help newcomers develop the skills and knowledge to participate in society – including initial resettlement services, language training, and job placement services.

- Services to bridge between newcomers and the community, such as interpretation and translation and volunteer programs.

- Services of a general nature specially adapted for newcomers or responding to their specialized needs, such as mental health programs designed to address trauma issues.

- Services to help communities incorporate newcomers, such as education and awareness building services and programs helping mainstream organizations gain expertise in providing service to newcomers (Canadian Council for Refugees, pages 18-19).

This framework provides a helpful perspective for looking at newcomer integration services in the Grand Rapids area, and gaining a sense of the roles and niches of service providers.

NEWCOMER INTEGRATION SERVICES IN GRAND RAPIDS

SERVICE OBJECTIVES	SERVICE BENEFICIARIES	SPECIFIC SERVICES	PROVIDERS
Services to help newcomers (individually and as a community) develop the skills and knowledge to participate in society (includes initial resettlement services)	Newcomers	Orientation session Information and referrals Language assessment, referral and training Employment and career counseling, placement, skills upgrading and certification programs	BCS, CHDO, LSSM each provide some of these services; most beneficiaries are refugees, with limited services for immigrants
Services to bridge between newcomers and the community	Newcomers The community Ethnocultural communities	Advocacy Translation and interpretation Host programs (and training) Volunteer programs (and training) Integration programs	BCS, CHDO, LSSM each provide some advocacy, host, and/or volunteer services primarily related to refugee resettlement C.A.L.L., Crossing the Communication Divide, the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, and Voices for Health provide a variety of interpretation and translation services
Services of a general nature specially adapted for newcomers or responding to their specialized need	Newcomers	Mental health, counseling and support groups, including family counseling and programs for trauma survivors Health programs	BCS provides mental health services for refugees KCHD provides initial health screenings for refugees
Services to help the community in its process of incorporating newcomers	The Community Mainstream service providers	Public education Cross-cultural and anti-racism training Programs to assist service providers to integrate newcomers Programs to assist in mainstream organizational change and development	Freedom Flight Refugee Task Force and Westside Immigration Advocates of Michigan are communication and coordination vehicles BCS offers workshops on refugee mental health issues for community providers

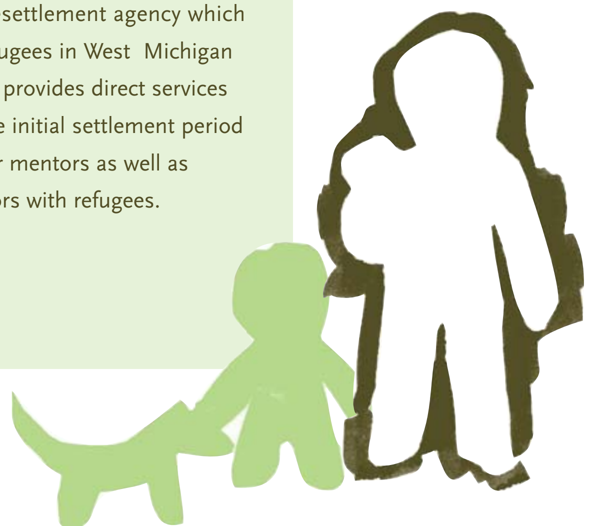
HELPING NEWCOMERS DEVELOP THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY

Refugee Resettlement Agencies

Over the past several decades, refugee resettlement agencies have played critical roles in providing supportive services to refugee newcomers, ranging from the Vietnamese who began arriving in the 1970s to the Somali Bantus arriving in 2003. Three primary agencies provide services in Grand Rapids:

- **Catholic Human Development Outreach (CHDO).** Established 25 years ago, CHDO has the largest and oldest refugee assistance program in Grand Rapids. As one of the largest resettlement programs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in the country, CHDO typically resettles 500-600 refugees annually. However, the refugee flow has diminished from a peak of 800-900 in 1999 to around 100 in 2002, a direct result of the post- September 11 reduction in the refugee and immigrant admissions to the U.S. In addition to refugee resettlement services, CHDO also provides immigration advocacy and assistance, as well as worksite-based Intensive Vocational English as a Second Language (IVESL) services. CHDO is a multi-program agency, with other services ranging from meals programs to emergency shelter.

- **Bethany Christian Services (BCS)/Programs Assisting Refugee Acculturation (PARA).** Bethany Christian Services' work with minors who are refugees is an outgrowth of its involvement in child welfare issues, particularly adoption and foster care. BCS initiated its refugee program in 1975 after then-President Gerald R. Ford asked the agency to donate foster care services for Vietnamese "baby lift" children. Bethany's foster care program for minor refugees not accompanied by parents or other adult relatives has placed more than 650 children, including 150 currently in placement, making it the largest unaccompanied minors program in the country. BCS also provides refugee mental health services and refugee outreach, assistance and referral services, although the future of some these services has been jeopardized by recent funding cuts. In addition, BCS produces a community guide to refugee adjustment services, available in several languages. Bethany's Programs Assisting Refugee Acculturation (PARA) resettles 50-200 refugees annually. PARA is an affiliate of Church World Services, a national resettlement agency which has been resettling refugees in West Michigan since 1975. PARA also provides direct services to refugees beyond the initial settlement period and matches volunteer mentors as well as congregational sponsors with refugees.



- **Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM).** The Grand Rapids area office of LSSM has been offering Refugee Employment and Placement Services for eight years and refugee resettlement services since 2001. In 2001-2002 the agency resettled more than 150 refugees. With funding from a state Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG), LSSM provides job placement assistance for refugees, including Vocational English Language Training focused on supporting refugees' employment- related language acquisition. Language classes are offered in community locations, such as churches and apartment complexes, as well as at work sites.

Other agencies also offer specialized service for both immigrants and refugees:

- **The Hispanic Center of Western Michigan** This center provides immigration assistance and translation and interpretation services, in addition to youth programs, case management and other services for the general Hispanic population. The number of people receiving direct services from the Hispanic Center has increased from 3,200 in 1998 to more than 10,000 in 2002 (Cortes-Gonzalez).

- **Farmworkers Legal Services (FLS)** Funded through the U.S. Legal Services Corporation (LSC), FLS provides legal services to documented farmworkers, focusing on housing, wage and labor issues, and health and safety issues. Since the 1990s, LSC regulations have prohibited grantees from serving undocumented workers or from providing legislative advocacy, unless they are invited to do so by a member of Congress.

- **The Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project (MMLAP)** Funded by state grants, local and state bar associations, and other private funds, MMLAP provides advocacy and legal services for current farmworkers or those who have settled into surrounding communities within two years. Because MMLAP receives no federal Legal Services Corporation funds, the organization is able to extend its services to undocumented farmworkers as well as legal residents and to provide legislative lobbying and advocacy services. The Grand Rapids MMLAP office serves the state of Michigan.

- **Compassion for All (C.A.L.L.)** A small all-volunteer program established in 2002, C.A.L.L. provides immigration services including information and referral, translation, helping with citizenship issues, and tax assistance.

Several **mutual assistance associations (MAAs)**, such as the Asian Center, the Islamic Center, and the Vietnamese Association, provide services aimed at supporting specific newcomer communities.

The Grand Rapids area has more than a dozen providers of **English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs, including public school systems, colleges and universities, and social service agencies and programs. ESL programs include one-on-one volunteer tutoring, classes aimed at students with varying levels of English acquisition, and worksite-based intensive vocational English language classes. ESL providers have recently begun meeting to share information and advocacy strategies and, under the auspices of the Delta Strategy and Grand Rapids Community College, have created a comprehensive listing of ESL programs in the area (see "Adult ESL Programs," page 33).

LINKING NEWCOMERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Interpretation and translation service providers in Grand Rapids range from small businesses to non-profit agencies. There are two particularly innovative programs.

Crossing the Communication Divide

This program is a pilot project aimed at providing skilled interpreters for patients in health care settings through video conferencing. There are seven project partners, including Metropolitan Hospital, the lead organization, and Michigan State University, the academic partner providing evaluation of the three-year project; Spectrum, St. Mary's and Pine Rest hospitals; Kent County Health Department, and Catholic Human Development Outreach.

Voices for Health

This is a for-profit business offering language and culture services, with a focus in the health care area. Services range from training medical interpreters to Spanish language and cultural training for health care providers, offered in collaboration with Grand Valley State University's Kirkhof School of Nursing and Continuing Education Department. Voices for Health also recruits, trains and supervises translators for WOOD-TV's recently-inaugurated Spanish language newscast.

ADAPTING COMMUNITY-WIDE SERVICES TO THE NEEDS OF NEWCOMERS

Providers of community-wide services play an important role in providing services to newcomers, with the challenge of assuring that their services are both accessible and appropriate to the needs of newcomers. Examples of mainstream service providers' services for newcomers include health screenings provided by the Kent County Health Department for newly-arriving refugees; legal services focusing primarily on landlord/tenant, domestic violence and consumer law issues, provided through Legal Aid of West Michigan; and advocacy, information and referral services offered through the Senior Refugee Advocacy Program of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan.

HELPING THE COMMUNITY INCORPORATE NEWCOMERS

Local coalitions are important vehicles for communication, service coordination and collaborations involving providers of specialized integration services as well as other agencies serving newcomers.

Freedom Flight Refugee Task Force

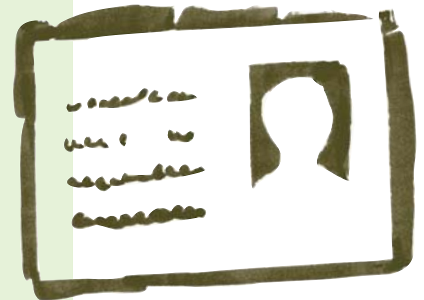
This group includes Grand Rapids refugee service providers, school districts, health care providers, and others. The group meets every other month to share information about new developments.

Westside Immigration Advocates of Michigan (WIAM)

WIAM is an informal group established in 1999 as an outgrowth of a statewide immigration advocacy group. The participants are primarily people who work with immigrants on a daily basis, as staff members or volunteers from organizations such as the Family Independence Agency, church ministries, immigrant assistance programs, migrant worker legal assistance, etc. WIAM focuses on education, networking, and advocating on immigration issues.

These coalitions reflect what appears to be a growing trend toward collaborative efforts involving newcomer service providers. Examples of this trend include:

- Training opportunities on newcomer issues, including workshops on refugee mental health issues, offered by Bethany Christian Services, and a recent one-day conference on issues related to the planned arrival of Somali Bantu refugees, sponsored by Catholic Human Development Outreach.
- Collaborative approaches to addressing system issues, such as developing a common agency referral form and working with the Secretary of State's office on procedures for gaining identification documents and driver's licenses for newcomers.
- Co-sponsorship of projects, such as a holiday party for Sudanese refugees and a visit by a Sudanese bishop.



Most newcomer service providers depend on a combination of federal and state grants, foundation grants, and donations to fund their services. And most of these service providers face both a growing demand for their services and increasing funding challenges related to current economic conditions, including federal and state budget cuts and decreased donor contributions. In this difficult economic climate, collaborative efforts play an increasingly important role in helping agencies maximize resources.

Strengthening the Community's System of Support

In order to strengthen the system of support for newcomer integration, three key areas should be addressed:

- Strengthening newcomer-focused organizations and programs
- Building the capacity of mainstream organizations to more effectively serve newcomers
- Involving the broader community

Each of these areas offers a variety of opportunities for building on existing resources within Grand Rapids and on the experiences of other communities.

STRENGTHEN NEWCOMER-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

Support Capacity Building in Newcomer Communities

Newcomer communities represent a large untapped source of skills and talents, at the individual level as well as the group level. Providing more leadership development opportunities for newcomers could significantly increase their involvement as participants and leaders in the civic affairs of the community. Supporting capacity building for mutual assistance associations (MAAs) could significantly enhance their effectiveness in supporting newcomer integration. For example, MAAs around the country are playing growing roles in conflict resolution, cross-cultural sensitivity training, citizenship preparation, leadership development, technical assistance, and economic development (Brown and Gilbert, pages 23-24).

The experiences of other communities could provide useful information for these efforts. For example, the Los Angeles Immigrant Funders Collaborative recently released *Rising with the Tide: Capacity-Building Strategies for Small, Emerging Immigrant Organizations*, a report of findings, lessons learned and recommended strategies (De Lucca, page 4).

Support Capacity Building in Newcomer-Serving Agencies

Refugee resettlement programs have been hard hit by the reverberations of September 11 and the current economic climate. On the one hand, the flow of refugees coming into Grand Rapids has dropped to about 20 percent of its pre-September 11 volume; on the other hand, the same agencies are being called on to provide more support for newcomers negatively impacted by the economic situation. The decrease in refugee arrivals has led to staffing cuts at some agencies, a loss of capacity that will cause further strains on agency resources as new groups of refugees arrive – such as the 150-250 Somali Bantu refugees arriving in 2003-2004.

The capacity of local immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies could be strengthened considerably through initiatives to support agencies in strategic planning, help them strengthen and stabilize

Throughout its history, America has had to confront the challenge of forging unity and a sense of common purpose among a diverse and ever-changing population.... How will we respond to today's challenges? Will our responses continue to demonstrate that the diversity of American society generates creativity and strength?

Together in Our Differences
The National Immigration Forum, page 1

funding, and encourage collaborative efforts. For example, there might be significant benefits to immigrants and the community if refugee-serving agencies could expand some of their services to the immigrant population, or if these agencies engaged in collaborations for recruiting and training volunteers.

Support Advocacy Efforts

Many critical issues related to newcomer integration need to be addressed on systems and policy levels. Advocacy is critical to raising awareness of these issues and educating policymakers, legislators and others to assist them in making informed decisions. Yet most newcomer service providers are so overwhelmed with meeting the immediate needs of their clients that they have few resources for addressing advocacy issues. Some programs – such as some legal assistance programs for migrant workers – are even prohibited from engaging in advocacy work, such as testifying at legislative hearings. Funder support for advocacy work is essential to engaging the community in addressing not only symptoms of problems but also underlying causes of these issues.

Enhance Services for Immigrants

The process by which refugees arrive and resettle in the United States is well-defined on the international, national, state and local levels, with designated refugee-serving agencies, including the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement and national resettlement programs and their local affiliates, at various levels. Funding mechanisms to support refugee integration – ranging from initial settlement assistance to employment assistance – are contained within this structure. For example, local refugee resettlement programs receive funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement for initial settlement assistance and from state workforce development funds for employment assistance.

No such structure or funding streams exist for non-refugee immigrants; for example, there is no national office focusing on immigrant affairs, although the creation of such an office has been suggested in a major analysis of immigrant integration issues by the Urban Institute in 2001 (Fix, Zimmerman, Passel, page 42). At the local level, availability and visibility of services for the general immigrant population are considerably more limited than for the refugee population, although non-refugee immigrants make up at least 90 percent of the newcomer population.

While there are three major refugee resettlement programs in Grand Rapids, resources available for immigrants are far more limited. Greater availability and visibility of support services for immigrants could have a major impact on the speed and success of integration.

Enhance Support for Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is a critical factor in newcomer integration, impacting everything from employment and self-sufficiency to social interactions and personal safety. A variety of English as a Second Language resources are available in Grand Rapids, including individual tutoring, classes, and worksite-based programs. (see "Adult ESL Programs," page 33). Recent funding cuts are expected to have a serious impact on these programs. Nevertheless, the experiences of other communities provide examples of strategies for building a stronger, more effective ESL system. For example:

- In Chicago, a recent study concluded that there are six major barriers to accessing ESL instruction, including onerous work schedules, schedule mismatches, and changing work schedules; child care; transportation; family mobility; and difficulties with ESL instruction, ranging from teaching methodologies to class lengths.
- Many communities are using television and video as vehicles for providing ESL instruction through distance learning. An ESL video series such as *Crossroads Café* or *Connecting with English* may be shown on a television station (e.g., on a school, university or public access channel), available for checkout from public libraries, and/or supported by weekly discussion groups in neighborhood settings.

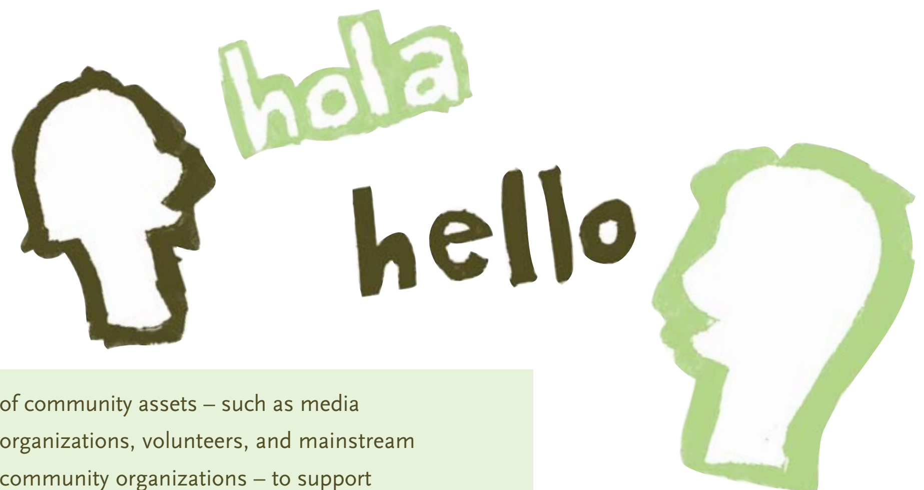
BUILD THE CAPACITY OF MAINSTREAM ORGANIZATIONS TO MORE EFFECTIVELY SERVE NEWCOMERS

Enhance Mainstream Agency Competency in Addressing Newcomer Issues

Mainstream organizations – ranging from health care providers to counseling services to employment programs – have had few opportunities to enhance their competencies in addressing newcomer issues. Expanding the availability of training for agency staff members could not only improve service outcomes for newcomers but also increase the effectiveness and efficiency of these agencies. Such training could range from general topics related to newcomers,such as refugee mental health issues, to cultural orientation for specific newcomer groups, such as the Somali Bantu arriving in 2003-2004.

Improve Access to Mainstream Services

Language issues constitute a significant barrier to newcomers seeking to access mainstream services. Few agencies recognize the importance of providing qualified interpretation and translation services, and most agencies that understand the importance of these issues lack funding to address them effectively. Agencies providing specialized services for newcomers are not funded to offer the broad-ranging interpretation and translation services that many mainstream agencies expect them to provide. Innovative and collaborative approaches – such as the Crossing the



Communication Divide initiative using video conferencing to provide interpretation in health care settings – could play an important role in addressing this issue.

INVOLVE THE BROADER COMMUNITY

Involve the Broader Community in Newcomer Integration

Although newcomer integration issues have a significant impact on the entire community, these issues currently receive little attention beyond the efforts of specialized agencies such as those providing refugee resettlement services. Increased involvement by other sectors – including schools, universities, health care agencies, neighborhood groups, and workforce development initiatives – will yield benefits for newcomers, the organizations in these sectors, and the community as a whole.

Build Awareness about the Role of Newcomers in the Community

As in many communities, immigrants and refugees have little visibility in Grand Rapids. Few people are aware of who the newcomers are, the challenges they face, the contributions they make to the vitality of the community, and whether the community is effectively supporting their integration and leveraging the assets they offer. Raising awareness about the role of newcomers in the community is an important first step toward more effectively leveraging a broad range of community assets – such as media organizations, volunteers, and mainstream community organizations – to support newcomer integration.

Build a Knowledge Base about Newcomers in the Community

There is a dearth of both quantitative and qualitative information about newcomers in Grand Rapids. How large are the various ethnocultural communities – Bosnian, Cuban, Mexican, Sudanese, Somali, Vietnamese and others? How do newcomers perceive the receptivity of the community and the factors that most helped and hindered their successful integration? How successfully are newcomers integrating, as measured by indicators such as language acquisition, employment, home ownership, civic involvement, and perceptions about quality of life? Are there significant differences in the integration experiences of various ethnocultural communities? What roles are mutual assistance associations (MAAs) playing in these ethnocultural communities? What is the potential for building the capacity of MAAs to play a greater role? How adequately are current newcomer services meeting the needs of the newcomer community – e.g., are current English as a second language resources adequate to meet the demand?

Many resources could be tapped to help build this knowledge base, ranging from local universities to information-gathering strategies described in planning tools such as Citizenship and Immigration Canada's *Workbook for Community Planning: Helping Communities Work Together to Help Newcomers* (Gruno and Stovel).

Moving Forward

Clearly, there are many opportunities to build on existing resources in Grand Rapids to create a stronger system of support for newcomers. What will it take for the community to move forward in seizing these opportunities? Learning from the experience of other communities around the United States and Canada, it is clear that funders play a crucial role. Some of the most exciting and productive work in this arena is being done by funders, often involving convening community organizations, establishing funding collaboratives, and other activities that go beyond traditional grantmaking.

Funders are uniquely positioned not only to provide financial support, but also – and equally important – to offer leadership on emerging issues, providing the impetus necessary to engage community organizations and individuals. Many funders around the country have embraced this role in addressing immigrant and refugee issues in their communities. For example:

- The Fund for Immigrants and Refugees, a five-year effort in Chicago, awarded $6.3 million in grants for newcomer-related projects to 66 non-profit organizations in metropolitan Chicago. Twenty-seven funders, including Chicago's United Way, 24 Chicago-area foundations, the state of Illinois, and one national foundation, have been involved in the fund, a special project of the Donors Forum of Chicago.
- The Colorado Trust's Supporting Immigrants and Refugee Families Initiative (SIRFI) is a five-year, $7.4 million effort. The initiative aims to enhance the positive social adjustment of newcomers in Colorado and to strengthen the ability of service agencies to address current and emerging needs of newcomers.
- The Los Angeles Immigrant Funders' Collaborative provides funding for organizations supporting the needs of immigrant and refugee communities in areas such as health care, education, civic participation and economic development. The collaborative has raised more than $1 million and in its initial funding rounds has focused on health and education access for low-income immigrant communities and supporting emerging immigrant-led organizations.

A key asset for funders exploring this arena – as well as an indicator of widespread recognition of the important role of funders – is Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR). GCIR is a national network of foundations interested in issues affecting the growing newcomer populations in their communities across the U.S. and Canada. Established in 1990, GCIR seeks to promote awareness and understanding among grantmakers about national and international migration trends, public policies and other issues affecting immigrants and refugees, and to increase

Each month, more new neighbors arrive in Grand Rapids. They come from Bosnia, Cuba, Mexico, Somalia, Sudan, Viet Nam and other distant countries. Their arrival here is a testimony to their courage, creativity and commitment – the same qualities that organizations and individuals in Grand Rapids will need to demonstrate if we are to capitalize on their presence as an opportunity for strengthening our community.

financial support for projects and activities benefiting immigrant and refugee communities.

Coordinated, strategic approaches to funding – such as focusing on awareness-building, capacity-building, and/or collaboration – could yield significant results. For example:

- Supporting community awareness-building around newcomer issues might help agencies tap more local resources, such as individual volunteers, faith-based volunteer groups, and private sector resources.
- Fledgling mutual aid associations might be strengthened considerably with modest capacity-building support, such as funding leadership development.
- Local refugee-serving agencies have indicated a growing interest in working collaboratively, particularly in view of recent state and federal funding cuts; local funder support could provide additional incentives for agencies to pursue collaborative efforts.

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Appendix

The Numbers: Grand Rapids Residents Born Outside the U.S. (2000 Census Data[1])

	GRAND RAPIDS		KENT COUNTY		GR-MUSKEGON-HOLLAND MSA		MICHIGAN		UNITED STATES	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	197,846		574,355		1,088,514		9,938,444		281,421,906	
Foreign-born[2] (Number/percent of total population)	20,814	10.5	38,154	6.6	56,066	5.2	523,489	5.3	31,107,889	11.1
Foreign-born who entered U.S. between 1990-2000 (Number/percent of foreign-born population)	13,294	62.0	22,299	59.0	29,258	52.0	235,269	45.0	13,178,276	42.0
Percent of foreign-born who are naturalized citizens		24.0		32.0		37.0		46.0		40.0
Population 5 years & older who speak a language other than English at home (Number/percent of total population)	29,201	16.0	53,926	10.2	87,126	8.6	781,381	8.4	46,951,595	17.9
Region of Birth (Number/percent of foreign-born population)										
Latin America	12,744	61.2	17,358	45.5	24,989	44.5	88,704	17.0	16,086,974	51.7
Europe	3,396	16.3	8,411	22.0	12,333	22.0	156,988	30.0	4,915,557	15.8
Asia	3,206	15.4	9,454	24.8	14,547	25.9	209,416	40.0	8,226,254	26.4

[1] *Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000,* U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 3 – Sample Data.

[2] The category, "foreign-born," includes immigrants, refugees and asylees. In 1990, six percent of the foreign-born population in the U.S. entered the country as humanitarian admissions – as refugees and asylees. Most of these do not remain in refugee and asylee status, but rather "adjust their status" to legal permanent residents as soon as they are eligible, which is one year after arrival. [Source: *Immigration and Immigrants: Setting the Record Straight*, Michael E. Fix and Jeffrey S. Passel, the Urban Institute, May 1, 1994 www.urban.org.]

A Sampling of Newcomer Resources in Grand Rapids

Refugee Resettlement Agencies

- Bethany Christian Services/PARA
- Catholic Human Development Outreach
- Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers

- Compassion for All (C.A.L.L.)
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- Kent County Family Independence Agency
- Kent County Health Department
- Senior Refugee Advocacy

Interpretation and Translation Resources

- Compassion for All (C.A.L.L.)
- Crossing the Communication Divide
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- Voices for Health

Coalition/Networking Groups

- ESL Providers Group (formerly Delta Strategy ESL group)
- Freedom Flight Refugee Task Force
- Westside Immigration Advocates of Michigan

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs)

- African Women's Alliance
- Asian Center
- Bosnian Club
- Dutch Immigrant Society
- Eritrean Center
- Grand Rapids Academy of Japanese Language and Culture
- Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- Islamic Center
- Sudanese Community Refugee Service
- Vietnamese Association

ADULT ESL PROGRAMS	CLASSES	ON-SITE/ CONTRACT CLASSES	TUTORING
Universities			
Davenport University	•		
Grand Rapids Community College	•		•
Public School Adult Community Education Programs			
Coopersville Community Services	•		
Godfrey-Lee Community Education	•		
Godwin Heights Community Education	•		
Grand Rapids Adult and Community Education	•	•	
Kent Intermediate School District	•		
Kentwood Community Education	•		
Sparta Community Education	•		
Wyoming Community Education	•		
Social Service Agencies/Programs			
Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (Senior Refugee Advocacy)	•		
Catholic Human Development Outreach (CHDO)	•	•	
Grand Rapids Dominicans (WORD program)			•
Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM)	•	•	
Kent County Literacy Council (KCLC)		•	•
St. James EvenStart			•

For additional information, see the Grand Rapids Community College English as a Second Language Community Resource Guide, which includes program telephone numbers and locations, class levels, participant requirements, costs, contact people, and related services such as child care and bus passes. The guide is available on the internet at www.grcc.edu/ShowPage.cfm?PageID=504.

As a result of state funding cutbacks, changes are being made in many programs, including reducing the number of hours of instruction and the number of sites at which classes are offered.

From Oppression to Opportunity: The Long Journey of the Somali Bantu

"We didn't know what freedom was; we have been let out of the cage and we don't want to go back in." – Bantu Elder[1]

In 2003-2004, from 150 to 250 Somali Bantus are expected to resettle in West Michigan, with the first families having arrived in June 2003. This resettlement will most likely involve many large extended families and, in some cases, networks of families from the same village.

Local refugee-serving agencies and other community organizations began planning early for the arrival of the Somali Bantu families in West Michigan. In February, 2003, Catholic Human Development Outreach (CHDO) sponsored a day-long conference featuring two leading authorities on the Somali Bantu. The conference was attended by more than a hundred representatives of refugee-serving organizations, health care workers, educators, mental health providers, law enforcement, faith-based organizations and other sectors of the community.

Approximately 12,000 Somali Bantu are expected to resettle throughout the U.S. in the next two years. In 1999, the United States determined that the Somali Bantu tribe was a persecuted group eligible for special refugee status, making them "one of the largest refugee groups to receive blanket permission for resettlement since the mid-1990's, State Department officials say," according to the *New York Times*.[2]

The Somali Bantus have a troubled history. Two hundred years ago, their ancestors were stolen from their homes and villages in Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania and carried on Arab slave ships to Somalia. There, they were enslaved and persecuted up to the present day:

In Somalia, the lighter-skinned majority rejected the Bantu, for their slave origins and dark skin and wide features. Even after they were freed from bondage, the Bantu were denied meaningful political representation and rights to land ownership. During the Somali civil war, they were disproportionately victims of rapes and killings.[3]

In the 1990s, many of the Somali Bantu fled the civil war in Somalia and ended up in refugee camps in nearby Kenya, "but, in coming to the refugee camps they found themselves living with the same people who marginalized them in Somalia," according to Frederick Ombongi, a caseworker for the refugee resettlement program at CHDO.[4] In fact, conditions became so dangerous for the Bantu in the Dadaab refugee camp near the Kenya-Somalia border that in 2002 all of the Bantu were transported to the Kakuma camp located nearly 1,000 miles to the north in Kenya.

The Bantus' troubles were not over. Although they were accepted for U.S. resettlement in 1999, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have delayed their progress. New security measures and a new series of required security clearances left them, according to the *New York Times,* " to languish in camps where children often die of malnutrition." The Times goes on to describe the spirit of the Bantu, faced with this additional delay:

But most people here are willing to do what it takes to live in a country that outlaws discrimination. While they wait, they learn about leases and the separation between church and state, and they practice their limited English. After centuries of suffering, they are praying that America will be the place where they will finally belong.[5]

When they finally arrive in America, the Somali Bantu face many of the same readjustment problems most refugees confront – related to language, culture and educational background. Their challenges may also be complicated by American ambivalence about immigrants since the terrorist attacks, the Iraq war, and subsequent events. However, those who have worked with the Bantus in preparing them for their journey cite numerous strengths and assets on which to build, including:

- A tradition of support toward extended families – and others – in times of trouble.
- A closely-knit social structure that they recreated in the refugee camps. "They quickly organized themselves into functioning communities with gardens for supplemental food, appointed elders and leaders to conduct ceremonies, and built fencing with guards to protect themselves from bandit attacks," according to refugee service providers who worked in the Kakuma camp.[6]
- A strong desire for a better life for their children, including encouraging them to become educated and successful.
- Resourcefulness and a very strong work ethic. Bantu have worked in Kenyan cities and in a variety of labor-intensive occupations; they have successfully established agricultural enterprises within the camps. They are reliable workers who helped construct most of the buildings in the camps in which they live.
- Resiliency and the ability to adjust to a variety of situations.

For more information about the Somali Bantu, see the 2002 culture profile, "Somali Bantu: Their History and Culture" at www.culturalorientation.net/bantu.

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U.S. Immigration Patterns

Although in sheer numbers the U.S. is experiencing the largest wave of immigration ever, the share of U.S. population that is foreign-born is still smaller than it was in 1910. Eleven percent of today's population was born outside the U.S., compared with 15 percent in 1910.

TODAY'S NEW IMMIGRANTS COME FROM DIVERSE CULTURES

- Earlier waves of immigration brought primarily Europeans.
- Since the 1970s, the majority of immigrants have come from Latin America and Asia.
- The number of sending countries with at least 100,000 foreign-born residents in the U.S. rose from 21 in 1970 to 41 in 1990.[1]

THEY HAVE MANY REASONS FOR COMING

- Sixty-five to 75 percent of the legal permanent residents arriving each year are coming to join their family members in the U.S.
- Seventeen percent of legal permanent residents were admitted under employment preferences.
- In recent years, about six percent of the foreign-born U.S. population has consisted of people who came as refugees and asylees.[2] In the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. admitted more than 100,000 refugees annually, with refugee admissions reaching a high of 131,000 in 1993.[3] Yet, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, tens of thousands of refugees who had been authorized to come to the U.S. were held up by delays in processing and security checks. Admissions reached an all-time low in FY 2002, with only 27,075 of the authorized 70,000 refugees actually making it to the U.S. The U.S. Committee for Refugees is estimating that as few at 40,000 refugees may be admitted to the U.S. in FY 2003.[4]

WHERE THEY ARE SETTLING IN THE U.S. IS CHANGING

- In the last few decades, 65-75 percent of all immigrants entering the U.S. settled in just six states: California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas.[5]
- In the 1990s, 759,000 newcomers settled in a 12-state Midwestern region. Although large numbers continued to settle in urban areas, "many of the new Midwestern immigrants are breaking old patterns of migration and settling in smaller cities and towns scattered across the region," according to the June 2000 report, *Immigrants of the Heartland: How Immigration is Revitalizing America's Midwest.*[6]

NEW IMMIGRANTS TEND TO CLUSTER AT THE EXTREMES OF THE EDUCATIONAL SPECTRUM

They are more likely than native-born Americans to have a very low level of educational attainment but are also more likely than native-born Americans to have advanced degrees.

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An American Paradox: Immigrant Nation, Anti-Immigrant Backlash

The following information is summarized from two documents prepared by James Crawford for the National Immigration Forum (NIF): "Cycles of Nativism in U.S. History"[1] and "Chronology: Changes in Immigration and Naturalization Laws."[2] Additional information about the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 is drawn from a report prepared by Peggy Gilbert and Gerald Brown, ISED Consulting Services, for the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement.[3]

As a nation of immigrants, the United Sates has also been a nation of nativists. At times we have offered, in Tom Paine's words, 'an asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty' from all parts of the world. At other times American have done the persecuting – passing discriminatory laws against the foreign-born, denying their fundamental rights, and assaulting them with mob violence, even lynchings. We have welcomed immigrants in periods of expansion and optimism, reviled them in periods of stagnation and cynicism. Our attitudes have depended primarily on domestic politics and economics, secondarily on the volume and characteristics of the newcomers. In short, American nativism has had less to do with 'them' than us.

Fear and loathing of foreigners reach such levels when the nation's problems become so intractable that some people seek scapegoats. Typically, these periods feature a political or economic crisis, combined with a loss of faith in American institutions and a sense that the national community is gravely fractured. Hence a yearning for social homogeneity that needs an internal enemy to sustain itself: the 'alien.' Nativists' targets have reflected America's basic divisions: class, race, religion, and, to a lesser extent, language and culture. Yet each anti-immigrant cycle has its own dynamics. – "Cycles of Nativism in U.S. History," The National Immigration Forum[4]

In its national mythology and popular culture, the U.S. is generally portrayed as a country that opens its arms to immigrants and refugees, providing a welcoming safe haven and bountiful opportunities for people fleeing persecution, poverty, and war. In reality, U.S. attitudes toward newcomers have always been ambivalent, complex, and extremely varied. At times, newcomers have been encouraged and warmly embraced; at other times, they have been the targets of discriminatory laws, hate crimes, and other manifestations of xenophobia.

The National Immigration Forum (whose motto is "To embrace and uphold America's tradition as a nation of immigrants") has chronicled the changing American attitudes and laws related to immigration in two informative documents, "Cycles of Nativism in U.S. History" and "Chronology: Changes in Immigration and Naturalization Laws." As the NIF chronologies clearly demonstrate, the passage of restrictive laws has marked periods of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment throughout U.S. history, with each era reflecting particular class, race, and religious issues.

U.S. IMMIGRATION HISTORY: OPENING AND CLOSING THE DOOR

- The nation's first immigration law, passed in 1790, restricted naturalization to "free white persons" – a racial requirement that remained in the law until the 1950s.
- The Alien and Sedition Act of 1798 – a response to politically active immigrants, including editors and pamphleteers – gave the President the power to exclude or deport foreigners deemed dangerous and to prosecute those who criticized the government.
- In the mid-1800s, a Protestant crusade fueled passage of the first state literacy tests for voting, aimed at disenfranchising the growing Catholic immigrant population, particularly the Irish.
- Over the next 100 years, a variety of laws institutionalized immigration discrimination based on race or national origin – beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and continuing with national origins quota restrictions enacted in the 1920s.

More recent history continues to reflect periods of openness alternating with anti-immigrant movements. With the 1965 Immigration Reform Act, the U.S. opened its arms to a more diverse immigrant population by ending racial quotas in immigration and opening the U.S. to Third World people. Two decades later, an anti-immigrant backlash – clearly a response to the growing size and diversity of the country's immigrant population – fueled passage of "English only" laws in the 1980s. By restricting the language of government to English – in areas ranging from 911 emergency services to driver's license examinations – these punitive measures jeopardized both the safety of limited English speakers and their ability to achieve self-sufficiency.

The Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986 provided amnesty for three million undocumented residents. In addition, by punishing employers for hiring undocumented workers, it created barriers to employment for the undocumented and opened the door for discrimination against anyone appearing to be "foreign."

ANTI-IMMIGRANT BACKLASH OF THE 1990s

In the 1990s, political, economic, and social conditions – including economic stagnation (in California, for example), concern about crime, racial tensions, and disillusionment with public institutions – again formed the backdrop for rising anti-immigrant activity.

- On the state level, California approved Proposition 187 – later overturned by the courts – which required public organizations, including schools, health care providers, social service agencies and law enforcement bodies, to determine the status of those they served, deny service to those suspected or confirmed of being undocumented, and report them to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).
- On the federal level, sweeping immigration reform and welfare reform legislation passed by Congress in 1996 had a far-reaching negative impact on immigrants, from removing basic social safety net provisions to subjecting them to detention and deportation without due process.
  - Immigration Reform of 1996: Restrictions embodied in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 ranged from closing opportunities for undocumented immigrants to adjust their status to tightening criteria for gaining asylum. The act tightened border enforcement and gave unprecedented power to the INS, expanding the grounds for deporting long-term resident immigrants and denying immigrants many due process rights and access to courts. The law also set new income requirements for sponsors of legal immigrants.
  - Welfare Reform of 1996: Before 1996 legal permanent residents were generally eligible for federal benefits, such as Medicaid and food stamps, on the same basis as U.S. citizens. The 1996 welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), denied eligibility to most non-citizens. Nearly a million non-citizens lost benefits as a result of this legislation.

    The act was notable for the complexity of factors considered in determining eligibility for benefits, such as:

    - Date of arrival in the U.S. Those arriving before the law passed were eligible for more benefits than those arriving after passage
    - Length of time in the U.S. Those in the U.S. five years or more were eligible for more benefits
    - Refugee or asylee status. Those who have such status are eligible for more assistance than immigrants who are not refugees or asylees.

Between 1997 and 2001, Congress enacted a number of changes which mitigated some of the restrictions passed in 1996 and represented incremental progress on immigration issues. For example, access to food stamps was restored to immigrant children and some elderly and disabled immigrants, the number of skilled temporary workers allowed into the U.S. was increased, and visas were provided for trafficking and crime victims. However, the events of September 11, 2001, had a far-reaching negative impact on immigrants and refugees.

SEPTEMBER 11 IMPACT

The impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks has been manifested in a variety of ways, some resulting from passage of the USA Patriot Act (Utilizing and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism), according to a 2002 study conducted for the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement.[5]

- A significant slowdown in refugee processing since 9/11 has left tens of thousands of eligible refugees stranded in refugee camps and processing locations around the world. While the stranded refugees face continued hardship and danger, the lives of many families awaiting the arrival of family members have been seriously disrupted by this slowdown.
- Many newcomers have experienced discrimination, threats and violence in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Manifestations of discrimination range from harassment of school children to adults' loss of jobs and inability to secure housing, while violent acts have encompassed beatings and even killings.
- Newcomers have been subjected to scapegoating, racial profiling, detention, and mistreatment by law enforcement agencies ranging from local officers to INS officials.
- Many newcomers have expressed high levels of fear, uncertainty and trauma related to shock that a terrorist event of such magnitude and the subsequent manifestations of prejudice and hostility toward immigrants could occur in the U.S. Required registration of immigrants from specific countries and detention of large numbers of immigrants have further increased immigrant fears – to such an extent that re-immigration to Canada has been documented in some groups most affected by post-September 11 restrictions.

While the study, entitled "The Effects of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks on Refugees and the U.S. Refugee Program," focuses specifically on the experiences of refugees, many of the insights and recommendations it contains apply to a broader spectrum of the newcomer population, including non-refugee immigrants. Recommendations range from

educating the public about refugee issues to strengthening mental health services for refugees and expanding the capacity of mutual assistance associations.

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[5] Brown and Gilbert.

From Newcomers to New Americans: The Successful Integration of Immigrants into American Society

The following is a summary by the National Immigration Forum of a July, 1999 study by Gregory Rodriguez. Reprinted from www.immigrationforum.org/pubs/articles/fromnewcomers.htm.

BACKGROUND

Anyone subjected to the intellectual debates on immigration of the past twenty years might easily conclude that immigrant assimilation is a thing of the past. At one extreme, right-wing nativists fear a collapse of the nation's common culture, asserting that today's immigrants are unwilling to become part and parcel of the nation's social fabric. At the other end of the spectrum, left-wing academic multiculturalists argue that today's immigrants should not be expected to assimilate into the culture they themselves have absorbed.

Fortunately, most immigrants do not conduct their lives according to the trends of café society. Contemporary immigrant families overwhelmingly do what newcomers have always done: slowly, often painfully, but quite assuredly, embrace the cultural norms that are part of life in the United States.

Assimilation into life in the U.S. has never required the obliteration of ethnic identity. Instead, it involves newcomers of differing backgrounds adopting basic concepts of American life – equality under the law, due process, and economic opportunity. Put another way, assimilation is not about immigrants rejecting their past, but about people of different racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds coming to believe that they are part of an overarching American family.

Assimilation is not now, and has never been, an instant transformation in which an immigrant suddenly becomes a "full-fledged American." Rather, it is a long-term, sometimes multigenerational, process. To some extent, it is never-ending: almost all Americans carry some of their ethnic past with them. Furthermore, U.S. culture constantly changes and adapts to immigrants, just as immigrants adapt to it. The nation remains, in the words of sociologist Nathan Glazer, "the permanently unfinished country."

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on four areas that we consider indices of an immigrant's commitment to American society – citizenship, homeownership, English language acquisition, and intermarriage. In assessing these four quantifiable indices of assimilation, we have chosen to rely on the 1990 U.S. census. Although conducted nine years ago, the decennial census is still the most reliable source of data on these indices. It is based on a large sample, which allows us to extract data on individual immigrant groups with great confidence. For intermarriage data, we also use the June 1994 Current Population Survey, which tracks generational differences. For the most recent totals of the numbers of immigrants and where they reside in the United States, we rely exclusively on the 1998 Current Population Survey.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Citizenship

In 1990, more than three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized.

Citizenship is the most symbolic sign of attachment to the United States. Whereas immigration itself can be reactive – a response to pressures in the home country – becoming a citizen is quintessentially proactive. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that naturalized citizens tend to have a positive outlook on the United States. Once naturalized, immigrants also take on a more active role in the civic life of the country.

The longer immigrants reside in the United States, the more likely they are to become U.S. citizens. While rates vary among different groups, in 1990 three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized. In the past few years, political conditions in the United States have effected a change in attitudes toward naturalization. The anti-immigrant campaigns in California and in Congress in the middle and late 1990s have been partly responsible for the largest rush to naturalization in the history of the United States.

Homeownership

Within twenty years of arrival in the U.S., well over half (60.9%) of immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing in 1990.

Homeownership is perhaps the most visible and durable sign that immigrants have set down roots in the United States. For most Americans – both native-and foreign-born – buying a house is the principal means of accumulating wealth. There is no greater symbol of stability, permanence, and faith in the future.

Immigrants are making significant strides toward homeownership. Within twenty years of arrival in the U.S., six out of ten immigrants lived in owner-occupied housing in 1990. In thirteen of the fifteen most populous immigrant groups, two out of three households were owner-occupied after twenty-six years of residence in the U.S.

English Language Acquisition

Within ten years of arriving in the U.S., more than three out of four immigrants spoke English well or very well in 1990. Less than 2% of long-established forty-year-plus immigrants spoke no English at all.

Immigrants are much better prepared in English than is commonly thought. In 1990, a majority (58.2%) of immigrants who had arrived in the previous five years reported that they already spoke English "well" or "very well." Within ten years of arrival, a little more than three-quarters (76.3%) of immigrants spoke English with high proficiency. Only 1.7% of long-established immigrants reported speaking no English at all in 1990.

Taking a look at the second and third generations, virtually all children of immigrants spoke English proficiently. In most cases, the native language of immigrants is completely lost after a few generations in the United States. In 1990, 98.3% of Asian-American children reported speaking English "well," "very well," or exclusively, and 95.7% of third generation Latino children spoke English "well," "very well," or exclusively. The idea of non-English speaking clusters remaining over generations is simply untrue. Sociologists have even designated the U.S. a "language graveyard."

Intermarriage

Intermarriage rates for second- and third-generation Asians and Latinos are extraordinarily high.

Intermarriage is not only a sign that a person has transcended the ethnic segregation – both coerced and self-imposed – of the first years of immigration, it is also experience out of a diverse cultural past. Intermarried couples and their children are living testaments to the fundamental tolerance underpinning a multi-ethnic society. Clearly, intermarriage illustrates the extent to which ethnicity no longer serves to separate one American from another.

Both foreign-born Asians and foreign-born Hispanics have higher rates of intermarriage than do U.S.-born whites and blacks. By the third generation, intermarriage rates for Asians and Latinos, the two largest ethnic groups among contemporary immigrants, are extremely high. Fully one-third of third-generation Hispanic women are married to non-Hispanics, and 41% of third-generation Asian American women have non-Asian spouses.

CONCLUSION

All available evidence shows that today's immigrants assimilate into U.S. society much the way earlier waves of newcomers did. The proof exists not in the rhetoric of the heated battles over immigration, but in the data revealing the often overlooked, everyday lives of contemporary immigrants and their families.

To order the full study, please call The Forum at (202) 544-0004 or write to: National Immigration Forum, 220 I Street NE, Suite 220, Washington, D.C. 20002. Cost: $10 plus shipping $5 for shipping and handling per copy (DC residents please add 5.75% sales tax to total payment).

A Sampling of Newcomer Initiatives and Resources in the U.S. and Canada

STATE AND LOCAL INITIATIVES

The Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP), California
A project of the James Irvine Foundation, the CVP is a collaborative of more than a dozen nonprofit agencies whose purpose is to enable immigrants in California's Central Valley to participate fully in the civic life of their communities. The CVP meets quarterly, designing learning opportunities to enhance the capacity of Central Valley organizations to support full civic participation among immigrants. CVP projects include the Civic Action Network, the Coalition for Tolerance and Understanding Fund, and the James Irvine Award for Leadership in Building Immigrant Civic Involvement.

The Fund for Immigrants and Refugees, Chicago
A special project of the Donors Forum of Chicago, this collaboration of twenty-seven funders – foundations, the State of Illinois, and the United Way in Chicago – formed in response to concerns about the impact of the 1996 federal welfare and immigration reforms on newcomers in Chicago. In four-and-a-half years, this time-limited pooled fund:

- Provided grants to a range of programs benefiting immigrants and refugees within the Chicago metropolitan area
- Promoted positive public awareness of immigrants and refugees
- Advocated within philanthropy for continued support of programs working on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Chicago
A coalition of more than 100 Chicago-area member organizations which educates and organizes immigrant and refugee communities to assert their rights; promotes citizenship and civic participation; monitors, analyzes, and advocates on immigrant-related issues; and informs the general public about the contributions of immigrants and refugees.

The Metropolitan Organization, Houston, Texas
The Metropolitan Organization brings together new immigrants and long-time residents of Houston to identify issues of common concern and seek actively to solve them.

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Center for the New American Community, National Immigration Forum
An initiative to create a nationwide network of public and private organizations to:

- Shape the nation's understanding of immigrant settlement and incorporation
- Influence policy
- Stimulate long-term investments in the civic participation of immigrants
- Secure resources for innovative and effective initiatives that assist and empower newcomers and the communities in which they settle.

The purpose of the Center for the New American Community initiative is to better enable newcomers to become full and equal participants in America, and better enable receiving communities to successfully incorporate immigrants and refugees.

Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)
GCIR provides information resources, collaboration, networking, and learning opportunities to enhance grantmakers' awareness and understanding of issues affecting immigrants and refugees and to increase philanthropic support for broad and immigrant/refugee-focused strategies that benefit newcomers and strengthen the wider community.

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
NNIRR is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It serves as a forum to share information and analysis, to educate communities and the general public, and to develop and coordinate plans of action on important immigrant and refugee issues.

***The New Americans*, PBS**
Created by the filmmakers who produced *Hoop Dreams, The New Americans* is a PBS P.O.V. series scheduled for airing in spring 2004. The documentaries provide vivid and intimate portraits of a handful of immigrants and refugees as they struggle to make new lives for themselves in the U.S. PBS has partnered with the nonprofit organization, the Television Race Initiative, to turn the airing of

the series into an occasion for community conversation, public inquiry and citizen action through local community forums, opportunities for online discussion, and electronic tool kits containing curriculum and organizing guides, fact sheets, and other sources of information on immigration and refugee issues.

***Research on Barriers and Opportunities for Increasing Leadership in Immigrant and Refugee Communities:* Public Report, Hyams Foundation, Boston**

This 1999 qualitative study involved staff and board leaders of organizations serving and/or led by immigrants and refugees, as well as individual leaders and experts throughout the country, to identify barriers and opportunities, best practices and model programs for effective leadership development in immigrant and refugee communities.

***Together in Our Differences*, National Immigration Forum**

This report highlights examples of innovative efforts which have been successful in bringing newcomers and established residents together to address common concerns and to improve the communities in which they reside. Initiatives include everything from a housing group that has transformed traditional tenant organizing strategies to meet the needs of an evolving mix of Latino, African, African American and Asian residents to a city-wide coalition advocating for high-quality adult education for African Americans and newcomers.

***A Workbook for Community Planning: Helping Communities Work Together to Help Newcomers,* Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

This workbook provides a tool to help those involved in settlement issues (i.e., education, health, social services, settlement agencies, and so on) to monitor the arrival of newcomers and their evolving settlement needs and to sort out the relative priorities for funding within their community. It includes step-by-step strategies for community-wide planning for newcomers, including pragmatic approaches to conducting surveys and research, recruiting participants, setting community priorities and taking action.

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