

HOW RECEIVING COMMUNITIES STRUCTURE REFUGEE SETTLEMENT
EXPERIENCES: THE CASE OF BURMESE IMMIGRANTS
IN DALLAS-FORT WORTH

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2023

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Stewart, Kaitlin Victoria. *How Receiving Communities Structure Refugee Settlement Experiences: The Case of Burmese Immigrants in Dallas-Fort Worth*. Master of Science (Geography), May 2023, 118 pp., 3 tables, 22 figures, 4 appendices, references, 134 titles.

The Dallas-Forth Worth Metroplex (DFW) serves as a diverse resettlement location for globally displaced refugees. While research examines how the nation impacts refugee resettlement, studies that examine the role of the city and community in placemaking are still lacking. In city resettlement investigations, research often focuses broadly on advocacy and political movements rather than the impacts of local-level structures and policies. In this paper, I develop an evaluation model using Jenny Phillimore's categories for successful refugee resettlement that examines how structural barriers, community interactions, and resource accessibility affect space and place for refugee populations. Through an ethnography of Chin and Rohingya refugee communities in DFW, I explore the differences between community-settled and state-settled refugee groups and the idea of an integrated resettlement program. Additionally, I argue that refugees who choose their settlement location in the United States are empowered and thus have a stronger connection to their host community than state-settled refugees. For example, in interviews, the Chin emphasized their ownership of Lewisville and feelings of home, while the Rohingya expressed feelings of placelessness and dispossession in Dallas. As governments push towards an entirely privatized system of refugee resettlement, this research argues for an integrated method that draws upon federal resources and community connections. Through the experiences of Lewisville's Chin community, this research demonstrates the potential of such a program in the United States.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to everyone who poured their time and expertise into this thesis. To everyone who listened to long rambles about this research, including my thesis committee and dear friends in my cohort: thank you for always putting up with my antics and sitting up for long hours creating new conceptual ideas. To my loved ones who did not always understand what I was doing: thank you for supporting me anyway. To my dog Indiana: thanks for staying up at night while I wrote this and making sure I went outside sometimes.

To the Chin and Rohingya communities who invited me into their homes and lives: thank you for sharing your stories, I hope I did them justice.

And to all the young people going through a challenging time: you can conquer dragons and reach your dreams. You are stronger than you believe, if I can do it, so can you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCM	Chin Community Ministry
DFW	Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex
FBO	Faith-based organization
FMFBC	Flower Mound First Baptist Church
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
ICNA	Islamic Circle of North America
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RSO	Refugee-serving organization
RSTX	Refugee Services of Texas
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
WCIAD	Dallas' Welcoming Communities and Immigrants Affairs Division

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the differences between community-settled and state-settled refugees in the United States by evaluating local opportunity structures that promote the successful resettlement of racial minority refugee communities. As global conflicts and climate change intensify, increasing numbers of people will emigrate under refugee status. As a result, there is growing interest in creating stable, if not permanent, resettlement solutions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) seeks to find such solutions under the umbrella of “durable solutions” (UNHCR, 2016). My thesis research examines and compares two Burmese refugee communities, their different resettlement routes, and the local structures and policies that impact them in the Dallas Fort-Worth metroplex (DFW) in Texas.

DFW is a relatively new area for the resettlement of Burmese refugees. After facing

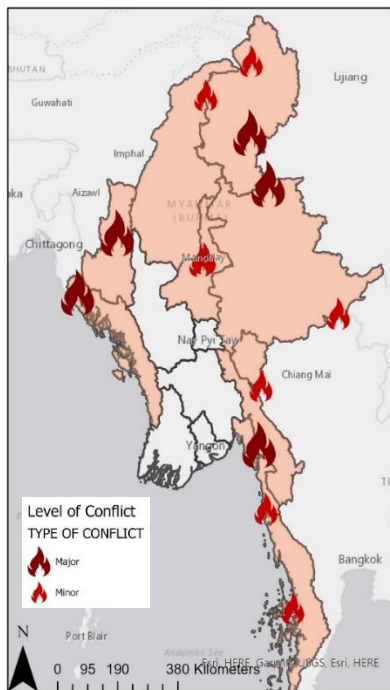


Figure 1.1: Map of major and minor conflict areas in Myanmar

racial persecution and ethnic cleansing in Myanmar (see figure 1.1), many Chin and Rohingya fled to refugee camps in countries such as Malaysia and Bangladesh, and after processing, sought resettlement in the United States (VOA News, 2021; UNPO, 2012) with DFW hosting two large settlements of each (Dallas Morning News, 2019; Pena, 2018). After the first military coup in 1962, the Chin State faced violence from the government for their support of democracy and Baptist faith. Increased military conflict in the Chin State led thousands of Chin to flee Myanmar in 2005 and seek refuge in Malaysia, leading to first large-scale recognition of Chin refugee

status (R.AGE, 2019). The state of human rights in Myanmar continues to deteriorate for both groups, leading to mass forced migration. In 2020, the government of Myanmar moved to close Rohingya detainment camps, replacing them with permanent structures on isolated and flood-prone lands, which placed the Rohingya in a state of near permanent emergency (HRW, 2021). Additionally, Rohingya living in refugee camps in Bangladesh face increasing persecution from a government that illegitimizes their citizenship status, as well as from the physical impacts of climate change (France-Presse, 2022). These human rights violations prompted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to grant and maintain Chin and Rohingya refugee statuses over time. Then, in the mid-2000s, the organization began to resettle them in the United States, as well as other countries.

As the Chin and Rohingya arrived in DFW, community organizations worked to house and integrate arriving refugees, but to different degrees for each refugee group. To better understand the different experiences of each group, I draw on literature that emphasizes refugee resettlement strategies, local opportunity structures, and acculturation stress to ask: 1) What defines successful refugee resettlement? 2) What structures, policies, and support systems impact the successful integration of Burmese refugees? 3) How and why do the characteristics of community and state resettlement programs create variations among DFW's Chin and Rohingya communities' experiences? Understanding the dynamics that impact the settlement of refugees and how local governments, refugees, and receiving communities work together to successfully integrate immigrants has broad implications for the creation of resilient solutions for refugee resettlement. In addition, identifying the impacts of structures within receiving societies, the role of acculturation stressors, and the cultural distances among refugees and receiving communities can aid in identifying barriers to refugee social and economic integration. This research also

contributes to gaps in refugee literature by examining how host communities adopt the community sponsorship model. Finally, my research can inform regional policies to improve refugee resettlement experiences in DFW. In this way, my research contributes to refugee research studies and has regional policy implications.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: CONTEXT OF BURMESE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

As of 2023, there are 103 million people forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2023). Over 30 million of them have refugee status. To qualify for this status, an immigrant must be “unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNCHR, 1951, page 3). As a result of increasing political violence and ethnic cleansing (UN News, 2017), over one million of today’s refugees originate from Myanmar (formerly Burma). Between 2010 and 2021, over 125,000 refugees from Myanmar were admitted to the United States, making them the largest group of refugees admitted since before 2009 (Trieu & Vang, 2015). An estimated 30,000 Burmese refugees living in the U.S. reside in Texas, with a third of those living in the DFW Metroplex (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex Within Texas

The resettlement of refugees in the U.S. currently relies upon two routes. Either refugees are settled with family members, or they are resettled in an area with other refugees from their country of origin (USCIS, 2018). However, problems arise when neither of these criteria can be met, which was a major contention when Burmese refugees first arrived in the U.S. in the early 2000s. In the case of Chin respondent Hla, her family moved three times once settled in the United States to find a community



Figure 2.2: Chin and Rakhine States in Myanmar

they fit into: from Michigan to the city of West, Texas, then to Dallas, and finally to Lewisville. Hla described many of their previous resettlement locations as unfriendly to refugees or difficult to adjust to given the lack of Chin in the area. Her family, like many other Chin families, sought a permanent place and community to reside in provided a sense of belonging. One Chin enclave emerged in Indianapolis during the same period the Chin began to establish themselves in Lewisville, but like many refugees, the lack of connection to the U.S. created difficulties for



Figure 2.3 Chin Students Leading Chin Cultural Festival in Song. Source: Lewisville High School

refugees attempting to establish a semblance of home. However, their eventual connection to the Flower Mound First Baptist Church (FMFBC) allowed the Chin to find place in the nearby city of Lewisville, which began their secondary migration path to the area. Eventually, large numbers of the Chin

resettled in the Lewisville at the same time, making their resettlement marginally easier than that of the Rohingya. There are currently no large established Rohingya communities in the United States, with communities spread out in small pockets. In addition, a long history of conflict between the Chin and Rohingya prevents the groups from aiding each other in the U.S. The lack of a strong ethnic enclave to lean upon in resettlement generally creates barriers to resettlement for refugees and migrants, reducing their connections to both their host community and their home culture, creating acculturation stress (Bhachu et al., 1993).

When refugees flee from persecution in their home country, they typically go to a refugee camp in a neighboring country. In camps established by the UN Refugee Agency, families declare refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which determines the best solution for applicants and then submits referrals to the U.S. and other participating countries. The processing time takes 10-26 years on average (RSTX, 2023). When referred to the U.S. for resettlement, refugees go through United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) interviews to ensure that they qualify as refugees for resettlement. Once approved, applicants go through medical examinations, and then receive cultural orientation and language training before settling in a new community in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 2018). This process takes about 2 years, leaving refugees in a state of purgatory as they wait for community placement. Some have called for reform to improve the process for refugees because of the lengthy resettlement process (e.g., Brown & Scribner, 2014; Ramji-Nogales, 2017; Perlin, 2018).

In response to rising numbers of forcibly displaced people, the UNHCR increasingly focuses on creating more successful social refugee integration in hosting communities. For example, in their 2021 Integration Workbook, the UNHCR emphasized the need to evaluate

refugee and receiving cultures to create more durable, long-term resettlements (UNHCR, 2016). One example of a successful resettlement in the U.S. was the experience of Vietnamese refugees in the 1990s and early 2000s. Bankston and Zhou (2020) found that overtime, Vietnamese refugees accessed economic and social resources from established ethnic enclaves in the United States to make significant upward progress for their children. Yet, despite the push for cultural considerations, the complexities of the U.S. resettlement system make it difficult to reach resettlement goals (Brown & Scribner, 2018). The greatest complexities within the system result from lack of federal support and frequently changing policies that make establishing a consistent resettlement system difficult. And although there is research into how the United States' system could be modified to create more compatible resettlement communities, studies generally lack analysis into how structures in host communities can build upon the cultural characteristics of the resettled refugees. My research aims to understand how different resettlement methods impact how Burmese refugees interact with, access, and perceive local opportunity structures in DFW.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

My research integrates three fields of literature: 1) state versus community refugee resettlement strategies, 2) acculturation stress and cultural distance and, 3) local opportunity structures. In short, state versus community refugee resettlement strategies emphasizes the differences between the two models. Literature on acculturation stress and cultural distance highlights the need to lower cultural distance between refugees and their host societies to decrease the stresses that refugees experience when acculturating into a new society. Finally, local opportunity structures offer a lens to assess the potential of communities for refugee resettlement.

3.1 State vs Community Refugee Resettlement Strategies

Refugee resettlement in the U.S. began shortly after the second World War, allowing the nation to accept large numbers of displaced people in ad hoc fashion. As time progressed, the Refugee Act of 1980 established federal refugee resettlement policy in the U.S. This codified the difference in definitions between refugees and immigrants, while also establishing federal assistance programs for newcomers such as the Office of Refugee Resettlement. During this period, resettlement policies aimed at reaching greater social inclusion and reduce the strain on the small-scale resettlement organizations (Kennedy, 1981). Additionally, this act laid the precedent of encouraging self-sufficiency from refugee populations, essentially pushing families to seek employment with enough cash flow to no longer need the assistance of the state (Brown & Scribner, 2018). As policy progressed, so did the focus on early employment and economic achievement with lessened federal resources, with the cash assistance period dropping from 36 to 18 to rest at only 8 months at the time of this publication. The policy focus on self-sufficiency

presents one of the major flaws with the United States resettlement system and many researchers push for a divergence from self-sufficiency goals to focus on a more holistic approach to resettlement (e.g., Gonzalez Benson & Taccolini Panaggio, 2019).

As a result of the Refugee Act of 1980, upon arriving in the United States, refugees access a variety of federal benefits. These include access to housing assistance, stipends, healthcare access, and trainings to assist in the transition to life in their host community. However, resettlement cash benefits only last about eight months. Additionally, if refugees move outside of a 50 mile radius of their initial resettlement location, they lose access to their cash assistance. This leaves refugees in the figurative lurch, especially those without established family members or an ethnic community in their host community (Bhachu et al., 1993). This generally drives refugees to local refugee-serving (RSOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) that aim to fill the vacuum of resources once federal benefits end (Frazier, 2021). These organizations tend to be small-scale non-profit organizations created by host community members or refugees themselves upon witnessing the unmet needs of the refugee population. Many of these organizations provide their services during the formal assistance period, meeting needs outside of federal benefits such as cultural, financial, and mental healthcare. Yet, these organizations often stretch their resources thin across multiple populations and often their interventions occur late in the resettlement process, making integration increasingly difficult (Karadawi, 1981).

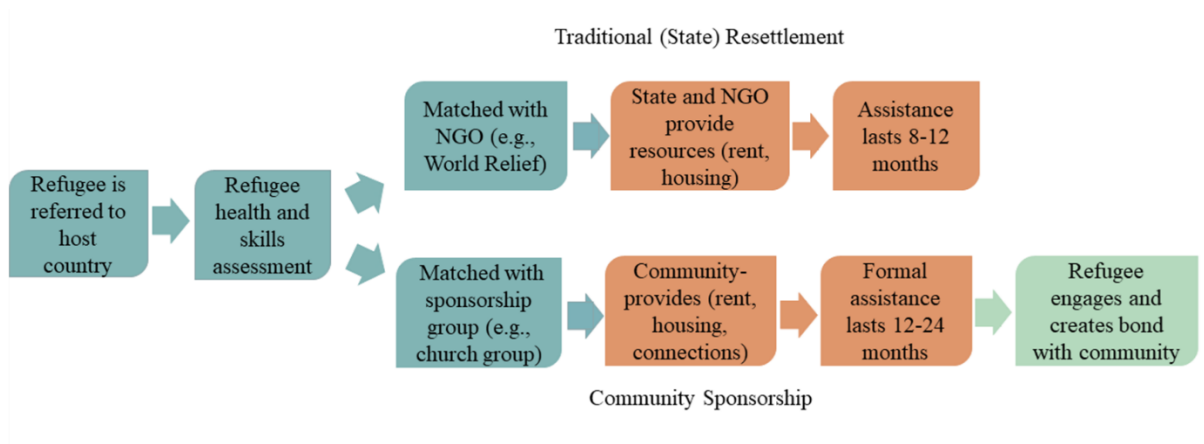


Figure 3.1: Flowchart representing differences between state resettlement and community sponsorship

Refugees go through a rigorous process before arriving in the U.S. (see above), and recent scholarly works highlight the ways in which the current U.S.’s refugee resettlement system is lacking and provides alternatives. In general, successful refugee resettlement requires seeking both the economic and social participation of refugees, which resettlement strategies can impact (Valtonen, 2004). For example, Driel (2005) proposes using the Italian city of Riace’s model, where refugees are settled in communities that seek them for revitalization purposes, which increases their socio-economic participation. Hovil (2007) builds on this idea, suggesting that refugees self-settle rather than go through government-directed settlement. By giving them a choice in where to settle, refugees can connect to geographic locations in ways that might better encourage community integration (Hovil, 2007). These are but two of the wide variety of resettlement models and strategies, but broadly, different resettlement strategies can be examined through two lenses: community sponsorship and state sponsorship. Community sponsorship, also referred to as private sponsorship, is a resettlement method implemented in a variety of countries when local citizens form sponsorship groups to resettle refugees in their communities (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019). State, or public sponsorship, is when federal and state governments of the host society facilitate the entire resettlement process.

Community sponsorship is a form of resettlement that allows communities to be more involved in the settlement process. Citizens create groups that receive and integrate refugees into their society. If a community in the host country wants to sponsor a refugee group, they agree to be responsible for all resettlement outcomes. Responsibility means aiding in multiple sectors of resettlement. Sponsor groups aid in job placement, housing, language, and cultural support, as well as providing avenues to connect socially to the local community (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019). In community sponsorship, host community members function as the facilitators of resettlement and government organizations continue to offer refugee resources to meet basic needs while the community offers supplemental services. In this way, community sponsorship does not mean the absence of state resettlement and involvement. The flexibility of community sponsorship models allows refugees from multiple backgrounds and pathways to establish residency and community by building relationships with community stakeholders. For example, community sponsorship can provide placement for refugee students, workers, and families who come through avenues outside of the UNHCR, which is the entity that determines refugee status and processes resettlement application (Bond and Kwadrans, 2019). The flexibility of community sponsorship, paired with improved integration of refugees, has led the UNHCR to recognize it as a tool for governments interested in creating new humanitarian programs and as an effective strategy in the resettlement process (UNHCR, 2016).

The traditional resettlement process has three main stages: relief (where refugees have their immediate needs met), rehabilitation (where refugees begin to receive physical and mental health care), and development (where refugees begin to build job skills and economic independence) (Karadawi, 1983). Most government and non-government assistance focuses on the development stage when refugees acculturate and create new lives in the host countries.

However, Karadawi (1983) argues that intervention at this stage is too late in the process to create successful refugee communities and merely treats the symptoms of resettlement issues rather than addressing the cause. Community sponsorship tackles these issues by increasing local involvement and intervention in the resettlement process. Because the availability of targeted support starts from the moment of first arrival, community sponsorship models can bridge the gap between government responses and refugee needs (Fratzke & Dorst, 2019). By integrating community-focused and traditional state resettlement, refugees are more likely to access vital services and resources in their host community.

During the resettlement process, different interpretations of refugee protection policies impact the ways in which state and local refugee serving organizations provide assistance. Karadawi (1983) asserts that because of the nature of the relationship between an assistance-giver and a beneficiary, there will always be some unequal or preferential treatment that inhibits success. For example, community organizations may give preferential treatment to refugees with specific religious or ethnic backgrounds. To Nawyn (2010), both government and non-government organizations subjugate refugees through disempowerment, which pushes them into low-skilled, and often feminized jobs. Forcing refugees into low-skilled jobs compounds other employment issues including access to social services, housing, and education (Bloch & Schuster, 2002). Improving access to community resources, while provided for base needs through state funding and organizations is one way to improve access to refugee resettlement services.

Local geography and community demographics add to the complexity of refugee resettlement strategies. Research demonstrates that in the past thirty years, refugee resettlement shifted from traditional sites such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, to other areas, with

thirty areas receiving 72% of the two million U.S. refugees since 1983 (Singer, 2006). During this period, DFW became one of the new refugee resettlement locations. Local involvement also can enhance federal integration programs. For example, local governments in Denmark created unique programs and political structures to involve refugees, and with increased refugee involvement, the city utilized federal program resources more efficiently by focusing efforts on refugee-identified needs such as job training or language services (Careja, 2019). In some cases, cities include ethnic group representatives in policy decision-making. Such integration programs help both refugees and the local community connect, increasing the local populations' involvement and advocacy (Soholt & Aasland, 2019). In their study of refugees in Norway, Soholt and Aasland (2019) found that a decentralized approach to refugee resettlement increased the likelihood of success because local policies could be oriented to specific refugee groups. Without local-level policy structures in place, accessible resources for refugee acculturation can be limited, which can lead to higher levels of stress and psychological distress, and further isolate refugees and negatively affect resettlement (Henklemann et al., 2020).

Community involvement in refugee resettlement also can reduce cultural distance. Communities that volunteer to sponsor refugees agree to meet a range of newcomer needs, including housing, language training, and cultural support such as mentor and neighbor introductions (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019). Creating positive refugee resettlement environments among supportive local communities also reduces voter polarization and decreases the gap between refugee supporters and those who are against refugees (Finseraas & Strom, 2021). The study examined how citizens of Norway reacted to voluntary resettlement of refugees in smaller cities. Many of the cities studied had previously never resettled refugees, but financial incentives from the local government encouraged many to voluntarily resettle refugees for the first time.

Despite original polarizing views, many voters switched to supporting refugee resettlement once they saw the positive impacts of resettlement overtaking the costs. Conversely, communities that feel forced to take refugees are often less receptive to them (Hernes, 2017). Therefore, community sponsorship not only reduces conflict with the local population, but local governments willing to accept refugees and participate in the resettlement process also are more likely to implement policies that assist refugees (Søholt & Aasland, 2019). Policies that actively contribute to the improvement of refugee experiences increase both social and economic integration, which increases the likelihood of successful adaptation.

The greatest issue when addressing these two forms of resettlement is the tendency of governments to treat community sponsorship as a replacement for state resettlement (e.g., Hirsch et al., 2019). As community sponsorship rises in popularity, countries such as the U.S. view its implementation as a shift in refugee resettlement towards a privatized system that reduces state expenditures (Montoya-Galvez, 2023). While state resettlement can present issues in access to services, loss of federal funding leads to fewer resources for refugees and greater dependence on community funding and resources (Nawyn, 2006). Additionally, community sponsorship is not always an appropriate form of resettlement, in the past when sponsorship was available to citizens, organizers experienced “compassion fatigue” and lost motivation to continue to support refugee resettlement (Frazier & Alexander, 2023). Instead, research suggests that community sponsorship could instead be viewed as a complimentary pathway rather than a standalone resettlement method to improve the state resettlement model (Tan, 2021). By instead evaluating how the two methods can work together to improve resettlement experiences, this thesis aims to seek a new positive solution for refugee resettlement.

3.2 Acculturation Stress, Cultural Distance, and the Role of Religion

During resettlement, refugees are vulnerable to psychological distress because of leaving their homes and entering a new society. Refugees experience stressors throughout their resettlement experience, from the refugee camp to the host society. In a study of Sudanese refugees in Australia, Khawaja et al. (2008) found that refugees not only experience life-threatening situations pre-migration but also have elevated levels of post-migration stress. In fact, refugees are 10 times more likely to experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than those who remain in their host country (Nilsson & Jorgenson, 2021). In a study of Burmese refugees in Texas and Oklahoma, Tonsing and Vungkhanching (2020) found that 34% experienced symptoms of psychological distress because of postmigration living difficulties and lack of access to social resources such as healthcare. They found that adapting to the new society, finding healthcare, and accessing social services were the greatest predictors of psychological distress among Burmese refugees. Post-migration trauma is high in many migrant groups, and Sangalang et al. (2018) argue that studies should focus on how it impacts resettlement. Elevated levels of acculturation and psychological distress can lead to health issues among refugees. Lack of access to healthcare in their host community can drastically increase the acculturation stress felt by refugees (Morris et al. 2009). Host communities do not often understand diverse cultural perceptions of medicine and healthcare, and many resources provided to refugees are not culturally appropriate, leaving many frustrated at the lack of care. These issues came primarily through lack of proper communication between healthcare providers and their refugee patients. Refugees often felt isolated because of the barriers present in the U.S. medical system, which made scheduling appointments and filling prescriptions increasingly difficult. In addition to accessing medical care, the cost of healthcare in the U.S. presented a major barrier to receiving medical assistance. (Morris et al. 2009). These barriers can further

separate refugees from host societies and prevent many refugees from continuing to access healthcare. In contrast, refugees in successful resettlement conditions experience lower levels of acculturation stress, and local organizations provide resources to minimize acculturation stress when it occurs (Renner et al., 2012).

Understanding acculturation stress and reducing its effects are integral to recent studies on refugee resettlement. Firat and Ataca (2021) found benefits to reducing the level of cultural distance, or differences between the host culture and refugees' culture. Among refugees in Turkey, cultural distance played a major factor in their interaction with the host society. When the cultural distance was lowered, refugee groups and the host community interacted at higher rates through religious practices and city events (Firat & Ataca, 2021). Shared connections between refugees and the host society at city and cultural events enhanced interactions. With increased intergroup contact, refugee and hosting groups had lower levels of conflict, and the host community became more receptive to policies intended to increase successful refugee resettlement (Firat & Ataca, 2021). In addition, studies find that accessing employment, housing, and religious connections in a new location can decrease acculturation stress (Villalonga-Olives et al., 2022). Creating a system that allows refugees to access state benefits and community connections will likely improve social integration and reduce acculturation stress overall.

Religion is sometimes a major aspect of cultural distance *and* conflict in refugee resettlement (Lazarev & Sharma, 2015). Hebbani (2014) found that many Muslim Somali refugees in Australia felt isolated and discriminated against for multiple reasons, but especially because of their religion. Religious discrimination affects employment, which can result in further social and economic discrimination. Combined, these discriminations can prevent refugees from fully integrating into host communities (Hebbani 2014). However, connections

through religion or other social modes might also help to reduce cultural distance, allowing refugees to experience increased levels of social integration and achieve greater success among host societies (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017). In Texas, located within the U.S. Baptist Bible Belt (Brunn et. al., 2011), religion plays a major role in the acceptance and integration of refugees (e.g., Kamisli, 2020; Mosher, 2021). This is of special importance to Burmese refugees, who come from a variety of religious backgrounds.

By combining community sponsorship and traditional resettlement, religion and religious organizations can shape refugee outcomes by providing social capital and connections to the local community (Bonaficio, 2010). Currently, many of the United States' resettlement NGOs are founded by religious organizations such as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Research finds that although religious organizations place their faith at the center of their motivations to assist in resettlement, the resources they offer to refugees are often secular (Nawyn, 2010). Therefore, understanding the role that religion plays in the resettlement of refugees is vital to creating successful resettlement policies. In the U.S., and especially Texas, Christianity plays a major part in refugee resettlement by creating cultural connections to the receiving society (Kurien, 2002). This is vital for Burmese refugee who come from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds. When refugees can connect to religious organizations, it can improve the quality of their resettlement (Vasquez & Knott 2014). Ability to participate in religious practice, especially if the refugees' religion fits within dominant religious structures in the receiving society, improves social cohesion and integration outcomes (Levitt, 2008). Religious organizations can provide resources to refugee groups with similar religious affiliations, including "social ministry" that encourages religious participation and pushes local governments to improve policy. Participation in religious rituals also increases intergroup contact

and can lead to higher levels of social integration (Siegert, 2020). However, a lack of religious connection, such as in the case of Muslim refugees, can lead to greater symbolic threat and fewer community connections (Partain & Weaver, 2022). When analyzing the response of U.S. citizens to Syrian refugees, the authors found that with the introduction of a hijab and other Muslim imagery, participants felt higher levels of threat. Feelings of threat increased even further among participants from a religious, but non-Muslim, background. In addition, in the past, religious organizations have used resettlement to proselytize and convert refugees often in coercive ways. These organizations offer vital support in exchange for participation in religious practices, thereby turning the resettlement process into a conversion scheme (Ong, 2003). When addressing religious organization involvement in refugee resettlement, a careful line must be traversed to create positive experiences. Nevertheless, Levitt (2008) asserts that migration research undervalues the role of religion in the resettlement of refugees and requires further research to improve refugee resettlement strategies.

3.3 Local Opportunity Structures

When considering refugee settlement and cultural distance, previous research often focuses on the social and economic habits of immigrants (Berry, 1989; Stein, 1981; Hein, 1993). In contrast, Phillimore (2020) argues that research also should focus on receiving societies and proposes that researchers investigate the resources within a host society. If receiving societies have policies, organizations, and programs that encourage refugees to engage in the community and address stigmas around refugee settlement, then refugees integrate more fluidly into the host society (Phillimore, 2021). Local opportunity structures provide resources to help with the economic and social integration of refugees, such as language learning, education, and community programs (Rivera et al., 2016). Yet, policies must also address refugee cultures to improve resettlement processes. If a settlement location understands refugee cultures and creates

appropriate programs to help refugees access vital resources such as healthcare, refugees are more likely to access the resources available to them (Frost, Markham, & Springer, 2018). Building on this, Ray (2018) asserts that refugee access to ethnic and religion-based organizations, which fit into local opportunity structures, smooths their transition into their new society. By having a matrix of refugee policies, organizations, and support, local settlement locations are more likely to foster a positive resettlement experience and integrate refugees into society.

Evaluating Refugee Success	
<i>Glossary of terms used for evaluation, including Jenny Phillimore's Local Opportunity Structures</i>	
Locality	The infrastructure and resources available to refugees within their host society regarding access to housing, work, and social support. (Delecretaz et al., 2016; Cilali et al., 2021)
Relations	How a receiving society accepts and interacts with refugees and how refugees interact within their resettlement group. (Ray, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019)
Discourse	The ways that local and national media and politics portray refugees and their resettlement experiences. (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Awad, 2010; Ehmer, 2017)
Structure	How integration policies at both the national and local level function when resettling refugees. (USCIS, 2019; Brown & Scribner, 2018).
Initiatives and Support	The local and national integration programs available to refugees and the resources available for them to create Mutual Assistance Associations. (Nawyn, 2010; Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017)
Acculturation Stress	The responses refugees have when adapting to the cultural and social norms of their host societies. (Khawaja et al., 2008; Sangalang et al., 2018)

Figure 3.2: List and Definitions of Jenny Phillimore's Local Opportunity Structures and Examples in Literature

Phillimore's (2021) categorical list (see figure 3.1) of local opportunity structures offers a method to assess differences in success among community and state resettlement methods. Each category represents an important aspect of refugee resettlement. Locality addresses the characteristics of the host community and the services available to meet refugee needs. Delecretaz et al. (2016) investigate how to improve matching programs for refugees so populations are paired with localities that can best provide for their needs while Cilali et al.

(2021) express the need for location optimization because of the travel difficulties many refugees face. As refugees adjust to their host location, they build relationships with their host community. Relations between receiving societies and refugees and inter-group relations among refugees are major foci of local opportunity structure research. Such relations include the ability of refugees to interact within their resettlement group and the local community to create spaces that connect them to their home (Ray, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019). Generally, refugee resettlement research finds that the current structure of the U.S. resettlement system is ineffective, putting strain on refugees and their receiving communities through a lack of support (Brown & Scribner, 2018). To accommodate the difficulties associated with resettlement, local and federal entities offer initiatives and support to refugee populations. These efforts aim to make services more refugee-centered, thereby making them more accessible (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). Finally, I add acculturation stress to the evaluation criteria as it reflects the health of the other local opportunity structures. If a community is well-positioned in the other five categories, acculturation stress should reduce as a result (Sangalang et al., 2018).

These local opportunity structures function together to create the refugee resettlement process and provide a robust method for the evaluation of resettlement success. When exploring refugee resettlement dynamics in Colorado, Hauserman et al. (2021) found that NGOs with refugees working within them created better connections for refugees in their host community. This can overcome some of the issues that Nawyn (2010) found in the tendency of NGOs to place refugees in low-income jobs that did not capitalize on refugees' skills. Some non-profit organizations use refugee participation to reshape perceptions of refugees in their community and create safe and welcoming spaces for refugees. For example, by opening a community center where refugees and immigrants can access resources and engage in activities non-profits can

create spaces for social participation. These spaces integrate refugees and the local community, which means English-speaking ability becomes a much smaller barrier to participation as refugees aid one another. In many organizational practices, refugees and immigrants teach courses to new waves of immigrants, placing emphasis on the expertise of refugees themselves, and creating confidence in their resettlement (Hausermann et al., 2021). When refugees can access resources in the host community and within their refugee enclave, social integration increases, which is a marker of successful resettlement.

Once connected to each other and to their local community, refugees can create spaces that build social capital, typically defined as the commitment that people have to each other within their social networks (Coleman, 1988). For example, Hughes (2019) found that Burmese refugees in Houston use food as a catalyst to create connections with one another. Sharing food from their home country creates social capital and resilient connections for the settlement group (Hughes 2019). Similarly, studying Chin refugees from Myanmar settled in the U.S. Midwest, Ray (2018) investigated the forms of social capital that refugees build during resettlement. Ultimately, the study found that access to previously established Chin communities and Baptist churches improved resilience and social connection. Coleman (1988) examines how social capital exists in the relations between people and facilitates productive human activity. Ultimately he found that increased social capital both strengthens the community and continues to grow as people use their social connections. When refugees feel connected to each other and their needs overlap, refugee-driven organizations can create member-directed services (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017). These services are derived from the needs and desires of the community and can differ from those that government organizations identify. Because refugees

understand the social and cultural needs of their ethnic group more than host society organization leaders, refugee created services are more accessible (Noyori-Corbett & Moxley, 2017).

The literature on local opportunity structures also highlights how media and political discourse impact integration (Phillimore, 2021). In the case of Burmese refugees in Indiana, Ehmer (2017) found that local media tended to paint refugees as outsiders who deserve a new life, while refugee organizations focused on refugee youth and their contributions to the host society. In instances where refugees received empowerment from local media, their participation in their host society increased and so did positive perceptions of their contributions to the host society. Local media also contributes to perceptions of refugees and their experiences. In schools, certain refugee groups are portrayed as high achieving and “model minorities” while others may be portrayed as low achieving and burdens to society (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Media discourse also can contribute to the host community’s perception of refugees. Haines and Rosenblum (2010) found that Americans are ambivalent in their perceptions of refugees, and that media portrayals of refugees could sway their opinions in either a positive or negative direction. Not only is the portrayal of the refugees important, but how their religion and culture are viewed by the community and media can impact host community receptiveness. Muslim refugees often encounter xenophobia and Islamophobia in politically conservative areas in the U.S., which makes acculturation and resettlement extremely difficult (Wekhian, 2015). Media portrayals of refugees can shape community perceptions and overall resettlement outcomes. Positive media and political portrayals increase social integration and often, economic integration (Wekhian, 2015) which makes resettlement more successful.

To summarize, the literatures of State Versus Community Resettlement Strategies, Acculturation Stress, Cultural Distance, and the Role of Religion, and Local Opportunity

Structures create a framework to assess refugee success in both social and economic integration. My contention is that a combined method of community sponsorship and state resettlement can increase the amount of local opportunity structures available to refugees in the receiving society, therefore increasing the likelihood of connections to their receiving society and self-empowerment through support networks to ensure success in resettlement. To examine this contention, I focus on two Burmese refugee settlements in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex (DFW).

CHAPTER 4

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

4.1 Study Area

To understand different refugee resettlement experiences, I examined two distinct refugee groups across two cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex (DFW): the Chin people in Lewisville, and the Rohingya from Dallas (see Figure 4.1). Lewisville has 113,000 residents while Dallas has 1.3 million residents. Using two different-size host communities enabled me to assess city size as a dynamic of refugee resettlement. Additionally,

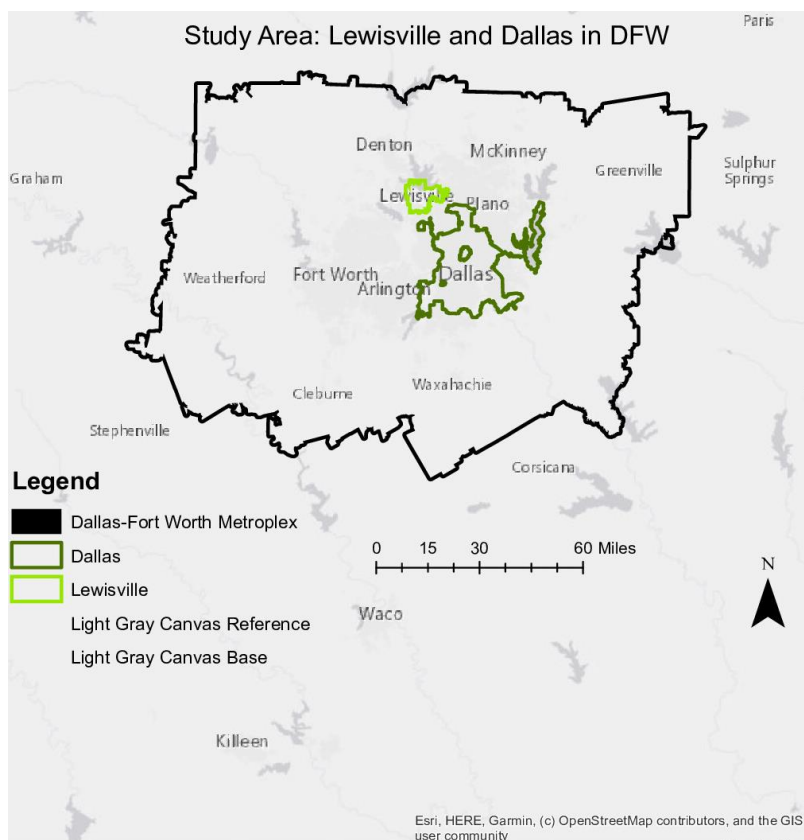


Figure 4.1: Map of Lewisville and Dallas within the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex

cultural distinctions between the Chin, who are historically Baptist, and the Rohingya, who are Muslim, allowed me to identify distinctions among refugees based on religion: since Baptists are more prevalent in Texas, the Chin may have broader access to social resources than the Rohingya. These factors allowed me to examine the ways in which local community characteristics impact refugee resettlement.

The Chin first arrived in Lewisville in 2007 after previous settlement in Dallas. Connections with the Denton County Baptist Association allowed Dallas' Chin population to

connect with the First Baptist Church of Flower Mound, which sits close to Lewisville. Those connections resulted in the creation of the Chin Community Ministry and the movement of the Chin community to Lewisville. Currently, there are around 5,000 Chin living within Lewisville's city limits. The Chin received and maintained their refugee status because of ongoing religious violence in Myanmar, including the burning and shelling of cities because of the Chin's advocacy for democracy (UNHCR, 2019).

After years of religious and ethnic persecution in Myanmar, including the delegitimization of their citizenship status, many Rohingya fled the Rakhine State to Bangladesh to reside in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Through the state-resettlement model the Rohingya applied for refugee status through the UNHCR and received admission to the United States. In 2012, some of the first Rohingya refugees arrived in Dallas after being paired with the NGO, Refugee Services of Texas. Many of the Rohingya live in Dallas' Vickery Meadow, a neighborhood comprised mostly of refugees. The area was originally developed for singles and young couples, but with the fair housing act of 1980, it opened to families. Now, resettlement agencies in Dallas use the area for incoming refugees because of its location and lower cost (Dallas Morning News, 2017). Currently, there are around 2,000 Rohingya living within Dallas' city limits.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

To understand what factors contribute to refugee resettlement outcomes, I conducted twenty-nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in each city. Respondents in each host city included ten refugees, two refugee organization leaders/volunteers, and two to three policymakers (see tables 4.1 and 4.2). Semi-structured interviews implement open-ended

questions that allow for deeper investigation into the experiences of the interviewee. Interview questions centered on refugee resettlement experiences and resources utilized during the process (see Appendix B). All participants were over 18 years old and spoke enough English to participate in 60–90-minute interviews. In instances where the refugee had difficulties with English, my experience with the Burmese language filled gaps. However, English presents one limitation to this study, as I did not reach interviewees who did not speak English. I recruited refugee participants using flyers, snowball sampling, and personal networks. Long-term connections with Lewisville's Chin community allowed me to draw on personal ties to expand participation in my study. To analyze local community responses to refugees, I identified public figures involved with resettlement processes and policy making. Upon receiving information for potential interviewees, I provided detailed information about the research so they could decide whether they wanted to participate. Most interviews were conducted in public places or refugee homes with some privacy. Before each interview, I provide each potential respondent with a consent form and asked for their approval for audio recording. During each interview, I took detailed notes on responses and emotional reactions to interview questions. I immediately transcribed each interview after its completion using MAXQDA. To protect confidentiality, each refugee interviewee has an alias.

Chin Refugee Respondents

Name	Gender	Age
Hla	Female	18
Pau	Female	21
Nu	Female	22
Salai	Male	23
Su Su	Female	24
Lun	Female	27
Ye	Male	28
Lian	Male	31
Than	Male	42
Mang	Male	53

Table 4.1 Chin Refugee Respondents

Rohingya Refugee Respondents

Name	Gender	Age
Zura	Female	19
Aye	Female	20
Khadija	Female	20
Abul	Male	21
Mohib	Male	23
Taleb	Male	23
Wai	Female	24
Sheikh	Female	25
Chit	Male	32
Saiful	Male	40

Table 4.2 Rohingya Refugee Respondents

Name	City	Position
TJ Gilmore	Lewisville	Mayor
James Kunke	Lewisville	Director of Community Relations and Tourism
Becky Nelson	Lewisville	President, Chin Community Ministry
Andy Plunkett	Lewisville	Chief of High Schools, LISD
Christina da Silva	Dallas	Division Officer, Welcoming Communities & Immigrant Affairs Division
Gay Willis	Dallas	City Council Member
Amir	Dallas	Volunteer, Ma'Ruf
Nasrin	Dallas	Volunteer, Islamic Circle of North Texas

Table 4.3: Local Community Respondents

After each interview, I used a rubric based on Phillimore's (2021) Local Opportunity Structures (see Appendix A) to rank each respondent's perceptions of local opportunity structures. The rubric ranks each structure on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest possible score and the least positive interaction with the structure, and five representing the best possible score and interaction, meaning that the structure was easily accessed. Based on their answers to interview questions, I selected a ranking for each success evaluation criterion. Rubric results allow for visual representations of the support offered to Burmese refugees in Lewisville and

Dallas. These visualizations, paired with the in-depth interviews, offer information on resource accessibility and city engagement in refugee resettlement.

4.2.2 Participant Observation

During the study period, I also conducted participant observation. In spring 2022, I received invitations to two refugee-oriented events. I participated as an observer and volunteer at both. At each event, I took detailed written notes on attendance and the flow of events, which were later written along with the interview data. Chin friends also invited me to attend the annual Chin Cultural Festival in Lewisville, where Chin students in the Lewisville Independent School District demonstrate Chin culture and discuss matters important to the local Chin population. During this event, I took notes on the interactions between the Chin and the rest of the local community, especially how schools facilitate connections between groups. After speaking with



Figure 4.2: Students in Chin Cultural Festival After the Chin Grand March

leaders in Dallas' Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Division (WCIAD), I attended and volunteered at the World Refugee Day event hosted by Dallas and the Refugee Services of Texas

where organizations that work with Muslim refugees and migrants were in attendance along with some Rohingya refugees. Every year, Dallas hosts World Refugee Day to celebrate the strength of the refugee community and offer activities for their families. This event provided a space for refugees to connect with refugee serving organizations and receive extra assistance where

needed. I used this event as an opportunity to network with the organizations working with the Rohingya population and better understand their needs and how Dallas meets them.

Participant observations at these events gave insight into the interactions among refugees and their host community. While interviews provided a basic understanding of social connections, observations offered new insights into how the host community and local organizations interact with their refugee populations. These observations also opened opportunities for informal conversations with organizers and participants to better understand the level of involvement from people outside of the refugee community in the resettlement and integration of refugees into the local population.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

5.1 Cost of Living and Access to Services

The cities of Lewisville and Dallas represent two distinct types of resettlement communities. Lewisville received the Chin spontaneously, meaning the city did not plan to receive the community nor did they have prior notice. Because refugees cannot move outside of a 50-mile radius of their resettlement city or they will lose their housing benefits, the community of Lewisville had to step up to provide resettlement resources, which I classify as a community-based resettlement strategy. Dallas, on the other hand, receives federal government support to house refugees, making it a state-based refugee resettlement city. Before Texas Governor Greg Abbot decided to withdraw Texas from the federal resettlement program in 2016 (Office of the Texas Governor, September 21, 2016), Dallas could independently decide the number of refugees that it was willing to host. As a result, since the beginning of the federal resettlement program in 2016 when Texas withdrew from the program, Dallas accepted thousands of refugees and through the Refugee Services of Texas office in Dallas and multiple other organizations such as Catholic Charities and the International Rescue Committee. This amounted to federal assistance of around \$600,000 per year, to provide for their needs (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2022). Dallas now has an established identity as a resettlement city, and it receives NGO support and generous donations to host refugees (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2022). The differences between Lewisville and Dallas as locations was a constant theme throughout the interviews, location also affected the cost of living for each refugee group.

5.1.1 Cost of Housing

While Dallas is a refugee resettlement city, it is urban and has a higher associated cost of living than suburban Lewisville. The average cost of rent in Dallas rose by 15% from 2020 to 2022, with rent in Dallas now averaging \$1,700 a month, about \$700 more than the surrounding suburban areas (Brown, 2022). While refugees settled in the United States qualify for \$1,250 a month in cash assistance for rent, this assistance only lasts for four to eight months. This difference in cost of living affects the type of housing available to refugees. In terms of housing, Chin respondents in Lewisville overwhelmingly owned or rented houses. Among the ten Chin respondents in this study, four families owned homes and five families rented houses (see figure 5.1). In contrast, the Rohingya participants primarily rented apartments: seven out of the ten Rohingya respondents were apartment renters and only three owned or rented houses.

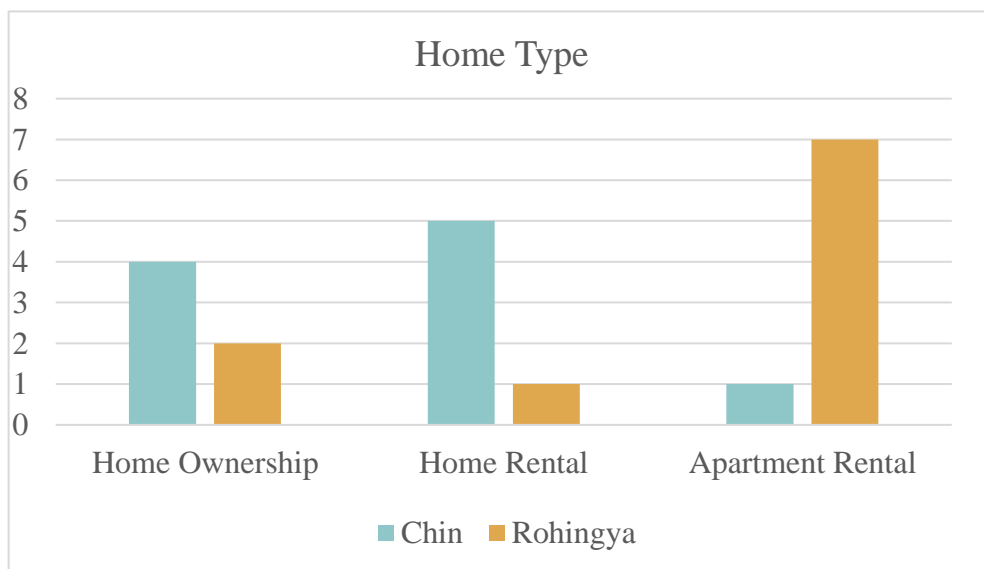


Figure 5.1: Graph of home types among refugee respondents

Among Chin respondents, their ability to own their homes elicited a sense of pride and they spoke of home ownership enthusiastically. Su Su shared how her family felt once they purchased their home:

When my family bought a house, it meant everything to us. My parents took so many photos, and immediately turned our backyard into a garden. I think for them, it was a way of making this foreign place their own.

Home ownership provides connection and belonging for the Chin respondents to Lewisville. In contrast, Rohingya respondents felt trapped in Vickery Meadow apartment complexes. When asked about the adequacy of their housing, Khadija detailed the Rohingya's frustrations, "it is so expensive, so we live with many families in one apartment and share the costs." The rising cost of rent in the city made many feel as though they could not relocate away from their initial resettlement home. As Khadija further explained, "We try to save so we can move. We want a house, a yard, something that is ours, but it is so expensive." Although cost of living is a major factor, this phenomenon also is partially attributed to residence time in the U.S., which afforded the Chin more time to accumulate down payments, access loans, and identify receptive neighborhoods. For example, longer-term residency in Lewisville allowed Chin respondents to identify local lenders, as CCM founder Becky Nelson told me. These local lenders offered the Chin more favorable mortgage rates, which allowed them to more comfortably purchase homes. Additionally, Becky Nelson taught financial courses to Chin families, emphasizing important elements of banking and using credit cards to help families establish their finances in Lewisville.

Unfortunately, rising home prices across the region may complicate refugees' abilities to afford homes in desired locations in the future, as Christina da Silva, Division Head of the Welcoming Communities, and Immigrant Affairs Division of Dallas elaborated:

There is a lot of political movement happening around the Vickery Meadow because of gentrification and so you know one of the big concerns is housing. How can we make sure that we have sustainable affordable quality housing for all our residents but particularly those that are most vulnerable like immigrants and refugees.

These ongoing political changes in both cities will continue to shape refugees' ability to find home in their resettlement communities.

Although many Chin respondents currently own houses, their original housing situation fell short of the standards for affordable housing set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). For example, many Chin respondents discussed living in poor housing conditions during their initial resettlement. As Mang, an older Chin respondent, noted about their first apartment in Lewisville, “It was cheap, but no good. So many bugs and the owner did not care. But it was home then.” James Kunke, community relations and tourism director of Lewisville, explained with regret the conditions of the Chin housing situation at the time, which led to the city’s decision to step in:

They lived in what many of us would consider not the greatest of conditions. There were a couple of incidents where we really had to step up as a city to enforce the quality-of-life standards on the property owners for a couple of these facilities.

In contrast, Vickery Meadow in Dallas is a dedicated refugee reception neighborhood, which means that state and local government entities will intervene when housing conditions deteriorate. The Refugee Services of Texas fills this role by actively connecting refugees to apartment complexes capable of housing large numbers of displaced refugees (RSTX, 2022). However, just because state entities can intervene does not necessarily mean that they will before housing conditions deteriorate. In fact, in August of 2022, a judge dissolved the contract the City of Dallas had with one of the landlords over two complexes in Vickey Meadows because of unsafe housing conditions such as lack of maintenance and issues with infestations (Jaspers, 2022). Poor housing conditions led to frustration among the Rohingya, who felt stuck in unhealthy living spaces. While both cities struggled to meet safe housing standards for their refugee populations, Lewisville’s small community and tightly connected group allowed for slightly faster and more direct intervention in housing quality.



Figure 5.2: Rohingya Refugees Praying in Apartment Laundromat Mosque. Source: Dallas Morning News

Cost of living differences also affects refugees' ability to own businesses and create community centers. In Dallas, Rohingya respondents noted how there are many employment options for them to access, but creating new forms of employment for themselves was more difficult. Navigating the fees, licensing, and start-up capital is difficult of most Rohingya

who want to start a business. Chit expounded on these difficulties, "I think if someone just showed us how, we could do it. But there is so much we must learn I'm not sure if anyone has the time. I think it will come someday, but maybe not soon." Although federal programs, such as the U.S. Small Business Administration grant for small minority businesses can assist refugees and minorities in starting small businesses, these programs are competitive, have extensive application processes, and are therefore inaccessible to most refugees in need of assistance (Lee & Black, 2017). Establishing and purchasing autonomous community spaces such as religious centers is also complicated. For example, in 2016, a group of Rohingya used a rented laundromat in an apartment complex for their mosque (see Figure 5.2). Although the mosque fostered cultural connection among the Rohingya, many hoped to open a larger, Rohingya mosque, as Sheikh explained, "There are some [mosques] in the city, but they are not ours. There is something special about being with your people, the shared experiences." In this way, the inability to access affordable spaces complicates Rohingya acclimation to their resettlement location.



Figure 5.3 Inside of the Chin Baptist Church in Lewisville

Conversely, the Chin could access funds to open businesses just as they do with favorable mortgage rates for housing. In Lewisville, lenders familiar with the Chin through Becky Nelson and her financial classes, funded fledgling businesses including restaurants, grocery stores, and convenience stores. The ability to create

businesses makes Chin stakeholders in the development of Lewisville. Lian, whose brother is a business owner in Lewisville, explained that “once you become a business owner you are now a big name in the city, you are seen.” Additionally, a local construction attorney assisted others with filing the paperwork to create the Chin Evangelical Baptist Church, which was the first Chin Church in Lewisville and also a source for employing refugees. Religious centers and churches not only foster refugee connection to the host community but fosters outreach to other refugee groups in the area, as the Chin Evangelical Baptist Church has done for Chin refugees.

As Hla explained:

Having our own church means everything to us. We appreciated the help of other churches who let us host services in their buildings, but now our churches allow other Burmese groups to host church services in *our* building.

The community of Lewisville fostered connections between refugees and business owners CCM programming, allowing them to reach out and find assistance to own spaces within the city.

5.1.2 Access to Refugee Services



Figure 5.4 Refugee Services of Texas Logo. Source: Refugee Services of Texas

A primary advantage of a state-settled refugee group is the ability to access a wide range of services and assistance from federal agencies, NGOs, and other non-profit organizations. Dallas is home to one of the offices of the

Refugee Services of Texas, which provides services to incoming refugees. Many Rohingya respondents expressed their surprise at the availability of refugee services and resources when they arrived. Zura remembered that:

When we first arrived, the services greeted us and set us up in an apartment right away. Then they helped our parents find jobs nearby and set us up in school, which is hard because we needed vaccines and paperwork filled out.

In this way, resettlement cities like Dallas provide important, readily accessible services that help refugees establish themselves such as access to assistance with job searches, housing, and getting students enrolled in schools. These benefits work to meet the basic needs of refugees in an efficient way as the programs are well-established from a long legacy within the city.

However, because resettlement cities must be able to provide for refugees from many origins, their services are not targeted or specific to any one cultural group's needs and tend to be broad in nature. The lack of specificity was a point of frustration for many of Rohingya respondents. Mohib voiced this frustration when he said, "Nothing is in Burmese; we must get people to translate things for us. It feels like the services do not care about us, the Rohingya." Although the services meet physical needs, they often fail to meet peoples' social and emotional needs. For example, the lack of documents in a familiar language can create isolation from service provisions, though the city is slowly beginning to foster new relationships with refugee-

serving organizations to bridge these gaps (see section 5.3 Building Trust and Connection). For this reason, groups often form non-profits, as the Rohingya did in 2020 with the Rohingya Muslim Relief group, to make up for this gap. Additionally, because of the large nature of the city, multiple smaller-scale organizations exist to assist in meeting the needs of refugees. Efforts done by Muslim groups such as Ma'Ruf and the Islamic Circle of North America-Dallas often provided extra help when federal and state resources lacked the programs the Rohingya needed. Abul described his early interactions with Ma'Ruf as we talked during World Refugee Day, "My family wanted to find a space with a prayer room in the city, they [Ma'Ruf] helped us find somewhere we could walk to easily. It felt good to get help from other Muslims." These organizations played a vital role in meeting the social and cultural needs of the Rohingya as they adjusted to Dallas. Yet, the broad nature of Dallas' federal refugee services, and the Rohingya's lack of visibility in the city, was repeatedly identified by respondents as the greatest barrier to the Rohingya's integration.

Many Chin, who originally settled in Dallas, moved to Lewisville after connecting with the Denton Baptist Association and forming a small church group within the First Baptist Church of Flower Mound, which is located near Lewisville. The move to Lewisville created a community bond for the Chin, but it also pushed them outside of the radius allowed to maintain their federal refugee benefits. As a result, the Chin lost access to state-supported housing, food, and employment assistance. The Baptist community in Lewisville instead provided many of the same resources, with some trepidation in the beginning. Becky Nelson, the director of the Chin Community Ministry, recalls the early days of the ministry when their community reached out to multiple supporting services:

We just started networking. I mean, everybody was using all their network sources to help. I used to say that for the first couple of years we were a call, text, email group. I

worked as a volunteer and case worker. This is what started our first ministries; ESL, getting the furniture, which was the funniest one, and getting the Chin kids in school.

	Establish	Equip	Engage
Definition	Provide for basic physical and structural needs to establish residency	Develop skills that equip individuals and families to thrive	Build cross cultural fellowship and internal Chin sustainability
Major Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation Services • Case Management • Basic School Issues • Resettlement Agency Liaison • Furniture Ministry • Clothing Give Days • Chin Clinic- Denton Country Health Department • Medical Outreach • Transportation • Rent Assistance • Financial Assistance Referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation Services • Case Management • School Buddies • Tutoring • Family Mentoring • Tenant Issues • Basic Medical Instruction • Back to School Paperwork • ESL/Citizenship Classes • Summer Reading Program • Home Ownership Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Mentoring • School Buddies • New Baby Baskets • Christmas Decorating Parties • Financial Assistance to Students for Extracurriculars • Participation in Chin community events • Student Encouragement • School orientations
Chin Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residency and Employment • Healthcare/Insurance • Acquire Basic Goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how to “Navigate the System” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with Americans • Move Towards Internal Sustainability
Chin Community Ministry Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Felt Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach and Train 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor and Learn

Figure 5.5: Schedule and type of support provided by the Chin Community Ministry in Lewisville. Source: author reformatting of Chin Community Ministry document

During this period, Chin community leaders were important organizers who facilitated connections between Chin refugees and other Baptist parishioners, making sure refugees received what they needed. Nu recalled her first interactions with the ministry, “I had been in the United States just a few days, and the ministry and Communities in Schools gave us backpacks with school supplies.” Because the Chin are Lewisville’s only refugee group, the city and refugee serving organizations can tailor their services to the Chins’ needs. This approach can be seen in Chin Community Ministry’s approach to providing services in three phases: establish, equip, and engage (Figure 5.5). As the ministry grew, so did the need to formally organize and plan for the group’s future. Becky Nelson aimed to “work the ministry out of business” so eventually the Chin would no longer need the ministry’s services. The establish phase aims to

meet the physical needs of refugees, while the equip and engage phases aim to create new economic and social resources for the Chin in Lewisville.

Nevertheless, the community-based nature of Lewisville's support is not without drawbacks. As a result of the community structure, some Chin respondents felt as though Lewisville's citizens would always view them as "just refugees" rather than active participants in creating the city's future. This is exemplified in Hla's thoughts: "It seems like the city still pities us, sees us as who we were rather than who we are now. That makes it hard to connect with them, to be equal citizens, not just refugees". Despite the fact that many of the Chin are currently citizens of the United States, Becky Nelson notes that white citizens of Lewisville struggle to see past their former refugee status and needs, noting that this "is the greatest barrier to interaction between the Chin and other citizens of Lewisville. There is a hesitation because they still see the Chin as a damaged group of people who need help." Nelson went on to theorize that as time went on, those perceptions would change and allow for more intergroup connections as Chin students continue to move through the school system.

In sum, the differences in the services available is a major contrast between the resettlement of the Chin and Rohingya and their resettlement routes. Although state support offers a wealth of vital services to refugees, the services remain broad and can lead to frustration. The efforts of smaller-scale community organizations made the most significant difference in helping Rohingya refugees with their social and cultural needs within the city. In contrast, the more focused community support allowed Chin respondents to not only create connections to the city, but also receive specific resources to meet their needs. By utilizing community stakeholders to facilitate resettlement, refugees can draw upon both federal and local resources to build a more sound foundation in the U.S.

5.2 Acculturation Stress

In discussions of resettlement experiences with participants, the difficulties of acculturation and adjusting to life in the U.S. appeared frequently. Every refugee I spoke with expressed feelings of frustration and confusion when faced with the differences between living in the U.S. versus Myanmar. Even the younger generation of respondents who lived most of their lives in the U.S. noted the difficulties of navigating cultural differences. Throughout the interview process, I found that while refugees experienced cultural and environmental stressors during resettlement, the resettlement cities and refugee-serving organizations worked to improve outcomes, but to different extents. Refugees in my study experienced three major forms of acculturation stress: language, transportation, and adjusting to cultural norms.

5.2.1 Language

Language presented the largest barrier for the study participants. Parents often relied on children's newly attained language skills to assist them with citizenship and work forms. One Rohingya teenager, Zura, stated, "school taught me English and right away I was helping my parents with documents." While translating for their parents helped the students improve their English skills, they also felt an undue burden. Several felt pressure to assist because their parents needed translation help but noted that accurately translating government documents presents difficulties and stress. Hla, another recently-graduated high school Chin student emphasized this sentiment, "We pretty much do all the translation work for our parents. That's a big struggle because I can know what a form means in Chin and English but reconciling those two can be hard." While both Dallas and Lewisville provide translation services, limits on services and issues of access make it difficult for refugees to get assistance when its needed. Chit, a Rohingya refugee, expressed the barriers to accessing these language resources, "I know help is there but when can I go? I must work during the day."

Without proficiency in English, refugee respondents struggled to accomplish basic tasks. Grocery shopping, receiving healthcare, and finding housing and employment all require a basic level of English-speaking skills. Ye, a Chin refugee, often went shopping with his mother, who expressed her frustration with food labels in the United States: “[My mother] would always ask me what labels said because she couldn’t read them, and her favorite phrase was ‘they have nothing good to eat here!’” Ye’s mother’s experience reflects both challenges with English and with adjusting to U.S. culture. Frustration with English comprehension was a common sentiment among both refugee groups. In Dallas, Saiful told of his experience applying for employment after losing his job at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic:

The [Refugee Services of Texas] services [found me] my other job. This time I [tried] to do [it] myself, but it is hard. I can't work in a regular store because my English is still not good enough. In interviews, I make many mistakes with my English.

Refugees also solve the English issue by taking jobs that may require little-to-no English proficiency. The lion’s share of the Lewisville Chin work in the nearby Tyson Chicken Processing Plant in Sherman, TX, where they clean and process meat. Similarly, large numbers of the Rohingya find work in cell phone factories in Dallas. However, these jobs can leave refugees vulnerable to losing employment as they are considered low skill and therefore more disposal, leaving them prone to layoffs. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the refugees I spoke with, and their families, lost their jobs. Language and navigating employment in the U.S. present major forms of stress for refugees.

5.2.2 Transportation

Along with the English language, navigating systems of transportation presented a barrier to acculturation. In Dallas, hit felt overwhelmed when faced with finding employment when he first arrived. “I [came] and I [knew] no English. I [knew] no one. I [felt] so confused about the

bus and forms. I [had] no paperwork.” While some local organizations offer driving lessons, the process is lengthy, and the Rohingya must navigate public transportation during the transition period. During this period, refugees felt increasing levels of stress and confusion. Wai expressed her bewilderment at Dallas' transit system when she first arrived. “The bus is so confusing. How do I pay for it, where do I get off?” Confusion with the bus system left the Rohingya feeling anxious about losing their jobs to tardiness. While Dallas has public transportation resources available, these are only written in English and Spanish. This forces the Rohingya to start from nothing to learn the system or rely on other refugees to help them navigate the transportation system or carpool. As a result, Rohingya refugees relied on carpooling systems to navigate to and from work. These systems appear frequently in Lewisville, as the city lacks access to an extensive public transportation, forcing the Chin to create carpool systems where possible. Lun explained the system his group of workers implemented: “We have a system where we help someone buy a car who works where we work. That way we can all go to work together.” However, carpooling can be difficult to coordinate, which Lun expanded on after explaining their system: “When one person owns the car, we are dependent on them. If they get a ticket or towed, no one can use the system.” Inability to easily access transportation in unwalkable cities causes elevated levels of stress and forces adaption for the refugee respondents.

5.2.3 City and Cultural Norms

Another barrier that participants faced when adjusting to life in the U.S. is understanding social conventions and city rules. Both the Chin and Rohingya are from agrarian societies, where city regulations vary from American suburban areas. One Chin refugee, Mang, described his reaction to receiving a citation for failure to mow the lawn in of his rental home, "I didn't understand why people care so much about the grass. In Chin State, we do not have grass lawn.

It's just plant." During their period of initial resettlement, Chin families received citations from the city for parking their car in the front yard, failing to mow the grass, and not maintaining trees on their property. The number of citations was so high that city officials eventually intervened by halting citations that came with fines in Chin neighborhoods until the residents learned city maintenance standards. Similarly, the Rohingya often struggle with cultural norms in Dallas. Abul recalls working as a cultural ambassador for his family, "I have to teach my father where he can and cannot smoke. He does not understand why there are places he cannot." Other instances of cultural differences were more stressful for Abul, "I was pulled over by a police officer one day when driving to work with [other refugees]. I was so scared; I have no idea what to say to them." These instances of refugees attempting to navigate cultural norms demonstrate the pressing matter of acculturation stress in their lives.

5.2.4 Mitigating Acculturation Stress

In both resettlement sites, successfully mitigating the impacts of acculturation stress depended on community social networks, which vary greatly between the Chin and Rohingya. Dallas provides resources to refugees, and creating a welcoming community and providing resources to refugees is at the center of the city's strategic planning. The Welcoming Communities & Immigrant Affairs Division dedicates itself to creating effective policies for the refugee and migrant communities of Dallas. By comparison, Lewisville possesses fewer federal resources for refugee resettlement. As a result, the success of acculturating the Chin to life in Lewisville started with the social network built by the Chin Community Ministry. When asked about the early days of the ministry, Becky Nelson stated:

There were huge disparities in understanding. We just did our best to help them know what they needed to live. I remember having a community member come in to teach them about financial literacy and how to use a credit card safely. Many of the Chin didn't trust the bank.

This social network led to multiple successes for the Chin, fostering deep relationships with the local community.

The Rohingya can draw on a large network of federal resettlement services in Dallas, but these resources are spread out across multiple refugee groups, making state resources less specific. As a result, refugee-serving organizations step up to the plate to offer acculturation resources on a more individual level, creating services that can address the specific needs of the Rohingya. Both Ma'Ruf and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) serve the Muslim community in Dallas and saw the need for transportation assistance for the Rohingya. When speaking to Amir, a volunteer at Ma'Ruf, about how they fill specific needs, he said, "We try to offer things that help refugees adjust to the city. Our caseworkers work with a family for four months, explaining documents, helping with school enrollment, and even helping with driving lessons." Recently ICNA started a program where people can donate cars to families who need help with transportation services:

Because we are connected to the Muslim community, we see the need of the refugees very clearly. We see them every day and know the gaps we need to fill to help them live here. The car program has really helped refugee families. Even if they know how to drive, how can they afford a car?

Refugee serving organizations in Dallas fill gaps in service through deep community connections.

Dallas is slowly expanding its services to target different refugee groups, including the Rohingya. The city understands that limited resources create barriers to acculturation for its refugee population. Christina da Silva, Division officer of the Welcoming Communities & Immigrant Affairs Division, said that they are moving to "the next level of language justice which is making sure that people feel like they can communicate with the city no matter what language they speak." As a result, Dallas has initiated a new language pay program that will

provide stipends to employees who speak other languages and help with translation services. The city also initiated master contracts with translation services to help departments access services that provide the most appropriate language resources to residents. Additionally, Vickery Meadow, the residential area where large numbers of refugees reside, has a library with multi-lingual staff. Their council member, Gay Willis states that “the staff, across them, I think there are five staff members, and they speak range of I want to say seven or eight languages.” The multi-lingual staff guide refugees to resources, teach computer literacy, and provide ESL courses, helping refugees adjust to major lifestyle changes in Dallas. Chit discussed the first time he learned to do an electronic job application at the library, “The librarian sat with me and walked me through everything, it seemed strange, but now I can do this myself.” This targeted community-centered resource provides a safe space to learn new skills for living in the U.S. The city acknowledges that it has further to go in terms of offering targeted refugee resources, but staff feel hopeful about its success in the future.

Lewisville’s school system created the first acculturation resources for the Chin. Andy Plunkett, current Chief of High Schools but then principal of Lewisville High School Killough campus, said that their work on helping students adjust to school started almost right away.

What we did after the first three months is we formed a group of student ambassadors because some of these kids were crying you know like when they got into school. They were just in true culture shock, especially the very first ones yeah so well what I did was I put together a group of Chin students who had learned English quickly and they were like the welcoming committee. So, they would come down and they would welcome the kids and they would talk to them in Chin and say you know we love it here we love the school you’re gonna love lunch I will help you with the buses. Even if those students were not in ESL newcomer class, we would put them in the same PE class or we would put them in the same art class so that one of the things we made sure that no new student was put in a class where there wasn’t anyone who didn’t speak Chin.

Eventually, the ambassadors program blossomed into the Chin Club, a completely student-run group providing support to new students and sharing Chin culture at the high school. Students

remember the early days of the club as being pivotal to their success in school. Pau, a young Chin student now in college, states, “I remember feeling so lost, but then someone came up to me and in Chin said ‘Hi, welcome to school, I promise they are really nice here.’ Things really looked up from there.” Efforts from the schools have blossomed, and now every school in the Lewisville Independent School District has at least one English as a Second Language teacher dedicated to the Chin and Chin students can now test out of Hakha Chin for their foreign language requirement to ease the stress of learning an additional language while trying to learn English.

Initial attempts on the part of the city were much later and largely unsuccessful. The city only began engaging with the community around 2018, when city officials realized that the Chin were in Lewisville to stay.

In 2018 we decided we wanted to reach out to our underrepresented populations. Which in Lewisville is the Latino population, that's a third of our population, and they're very underrepresented in terms of leadership participation. Then Chin community which is about four to five percent of our population.

Initially, the city attempted to follow the same pattern it implemented with the Latinx population, which was to send paperwork home with students to give to their parents. This, however, failed with the Chin because generally children avoided adding extra burdens to their parents and attempted to handle paperwork on their own. As a result, the city reached out to Becky Nelson and the Chin Community Ministry to find out what the community needed. The result was a series of videos in Hakha Chin on how to reside in Lewisville called the Chin Good Neighbor Project. James Kunke discussed that what led to the decision to make the videos was realizing that the Chin did not understand city regulations in Lewisville:

So rather than being the enforcement arm and going up to the house and saying move your car, you can get a ticket, instead, we recruited members of the local Chin

community. Some high-profile individuals, a beauty queen, a pastor, a business owner, and we did a series of short videos in Hakha.

These videos provide Chin community members with parking instructions, driving tips, and approved methods for recycling. Many of the topics were suggested by Chin leaders who identified the issues most important to their community. The Chin Good Neighbor Project left a lasting impact on the Chin and improved their adjustment to the city. The videos are now shown on the Chin TV network based in Indiana.



Figure 5.6 Chin Good Neighbor Project Video Detailing how to Take the Census

These efforts demonstrate the strength of the community-based model in Lewisville in creating programs to help refugees with acculturation stress. The connections between the Chin and community advocates allowed them to express their needs to city programming officers, creating help in areas that city officials had not considered before. Currently, the model in Dallas lacks the depth to provide targeted services to address acculturation stress amongst the Rohingya. If the WCIAD of the local government created liaison programs that allowed refugee leaders to voice the needs of their communities, a similar outcome could be achieved.

5.3 Building Trust and Connection

Throughout the interview process, a central theme of building trust and communication with each refugee population appeared. The Chin and Rohingya faced immense religious and ethnic violence in Myanmar, making them distrustful of central authority. As a result, both

groups hesitate to interact with city governments and residents, making it difficult for each city to target specific needs. In addition, ethnic cleansing in Myanmar led the Chin and Rohingya to protect their cultures and fear potential Americanization, which reduces the amount of interaction among the refugees and the host societies. This section analyzes the attempts by Dallas and Lewisville to create connections with refugee communities and the hesitations of the refugee populations.

5.3.1 Government Outreach

Lewisville's city government remained uninvolved in the lives of the Chin until 2018. Despite the Chin having lived in Lewisville for ten years prior, city officials waited until they believed the Chin planned to stay. At this point, the Chin comprised four percent of the population of Lewisville. However, the first attempts to connect with the Chin was difficult as the city did not understand Chin culture. Initial attempts included sending students home with materials to give to their parents, but in Chin culture, children are taught to respect their parents and avoid giving them extra work. James Kunke, Lewisville's Director of Community Relations and Tourism explained:

We formed a task force. We first we just interviewed city people from all sorts of departments to say 'how can we reach these this population?' and our first few moves were horrible mistakes. They just were because we went in there and said 'OK we've been we've been successful reaching the Latino population going through schools. Give this stuff to the kids, kids take it home, they read it to mom and dad, mom and dad get it. We are just gonna do the same thing immigrant family immigrant family second language second language let's just follow the cookie cutter'. I guess to continue the analogy; we burned our cookies.

Becky Nelson of the Chin Community Ministry connected city officials with key members of the Chin community, which led to an open dialog that allowed the city to understand the needs of the Chin. Soon, the city began participating in major Chin events. After the 2021 military coup in



Figure 5.7: Chin community rallying at Lewisville city hall to protest Myanmar’s military coup. Source City of Lewisville



Figure 5.8: Mockup of Madeline Wiener’s proposed statue to honor Lewisville’s Chin community. Source: City of Lewisville

Myanmar, the Lewisville Chin community requested a rally at city hall to protest the military government (see Figure 5.7). The Lewisville mayor and city council immediately provided support. Mayor Gilmore stated, “When the Chin wanted to have that rally here on the central City Hall we said absolutely, when do you want it done, and we scheduled it. That’s pretty much all we did. we supported their voices.” In addition to allowing the Chin to host their protest, the mayor of Lewisville at the time, Rudy Durham issued a proclamation from the city calling for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar (City of Lewisville, 2021). In another example, as

part of the city’s plan for public art, the city government commissioned a

statue to represent the journey of the Chin to Lewisville and their role in the community (see Figure 5.8). While this seems like a small gesture, it is important to the Chin, as Hla mentioned in her interview. James Kunke, Lewisville’s Director of Community Relations and Tourism explained that the city held a meeting where the Chin could come see the mockup and offer their insights. Originally, the artist had the mother holding her baby, but the Chin in attendance

grabbed some fabric and demonstrated to her how they carried their children when traveling to Malaysia, where they stayed in refugee camps before arriving in the U.S. This gave the Chin community a voice in the statue and in the story told about their journey. When the statue came up in conversation with Hla, she expressed that it helped demonstrate the growth of the community's connection to the Chin, "The statue now, that kind of also shows just how much the City Council is really trying to welcome us." She then added that when she lived in other cities, acceptance did not come as readily, "I know a lot of other cities that have thousands or maybe hundreds of Chin people and Lewisville is probably the most accepting and adapting, I guess I could say, of us." Once the city created contact with key leaders, such as pastors and educators, serving the Chin and creating trust came more naturally as Chin members guided city programs to meet Chin needs.

Dallas serves thousands of refugees with vital services. However, the large number of refugees creates difficulties in connecting with specific groups, such as the Rohingya. To create connections, the city works on building relationships with the refugees, hosting World Refugee Day, and providing multiple resources to assist different refugee groups. World Refugee Day provides opportunities for the city to interact directly with refugee groups. In a conversation about refugee events in the city, Christina da Silva, Division Chair of WCIAD, who leads the city's main efforts aimed at refugee integration, said:

There are a lot. In Clyde Warren Park there was an Indian festival that I stopped by for a few minutes, and that's in the heart of our downtown. So to see that [multiculturalism] reflected in our city the programming and leadership is great. My hope is that we continue to build on that.

The city also cultivates relationships with the local refugee serving organizations. The WCIAD organizes Dallas' World Refugee Day, helping to find the space to host it and organizing volunteers to set up stalls and run the events. This effort is one of many measures the

city takes to build relationships between themselves, refugees, and refugee serving organizations. In addition, WCIAD is open for organizations to voice their concerns and needs. Nasrin at Islamic Circle of North America-Dallas explained what those relationships look like, “The process is not perfect, but the city does make efforts to work with us and know us. We can let them know what our communities are needing, and the Welcoming Division is invested in making changes for us.” With the support of Dallas’s WCIAD, refugee-serving organizations function more effectively when serving their populations and create important indirect relationships between refugees and their resettlement city. The Division’s purpose is to advocate for and create legislation to improve the lives of refugees and migrants living within the city, and with continued community input, these efforts begin to close the gaps in tailored services (see cost of living and access to services).

In general, the community-based assistance programs in Lewisville allowed the Chin to create connections with their local government. The CCM connected Chin community leaders like pastors and educators who helped facilitate programs like the protest against the military coup that allowed the Chin to feel more comfortable with their city government. While similar efforts exist in Dallas through the WCIAD, the larger government and lack of community facilitation means that the Rohingya lack influence and connection to their local government. However, as community members step up to involve themselves in refugee resettlement in Dallas, these efforts could become more profound.

5.3.2 Community

In Lewisville, the forging connections between the Chin and Lewisville’s American citizens lies at the center of the city’s strategy for relationship building. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Lewisville resident on social media attempted to claim that the Chin

brought COVID to Lewisville. According to James Kunke, (position) the post spread quickly on social media. However, when asked about the community’s response to the claim, he said:

In general, the social media pushback has been excellent. It is a way for residents to go ‘That’s not what we do here.’ There is always a few people who are going to feel threatened, but every time somebody speaks up with one of those voices of division, those voices of exclusion, they’re shouted down.

Chin events are central to their connection to the host community. Every year, the city hosts a Chin Cultural Festival on Chin National Day. This festival allows the students in the Chin Club to share songs, dances, and important ideals from back home with each other. After the protests in Lewisville against the military coup in Myanmar, the Chin students presented personal stories to demonstrate to Lewisville residents the hardships faced by their family and friends back home. While these events are hosted to benefit the Chin community, outsiders attend as well. Every year city officials, teachers, and Lewisville residents turn out to support the students. Large turnouts of non-Chin often surprise the organizers. Pau, a former member of the Chin Club, said, "I remember thinking 'oh my gosh, there's so many white people here, I never expected so many non-Chin people to come'"

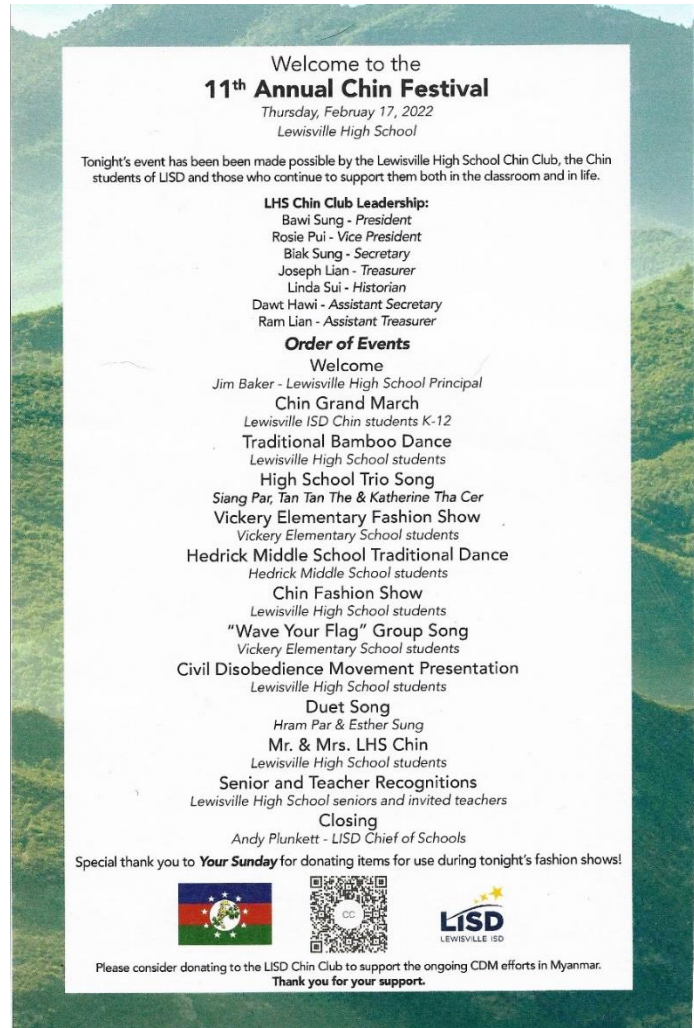


Figure 5.9: Program for 11th Annual Chin Cultural Festival

As a result of this support, the younger generation of Chin respondents felt a strong connection to Lewisville.

Dallas functioning as a refugee resettlement site encourages the local community to step up and invest in the lives of refugees. When discussing what she thought is the best thing Dallas does for refugees, Christina da Silva, Division Chair of Dallas' WCIAD, emphasized the community, "I think from a community level standpoint it's incredible to see people really stepping up and you know both refugees themselves and also people from the community like wanting to get involved." The leadership of Dallas identified that the community played the largest role in fostering relationships with refugees. Gay Willis, Dallas City Council Representative for District 13, argued that Dallas remains strong in its resolve to support refugees despite negative media representation of migrants: "In spite of changes in support from the state, we still have our nonprofits, we still have a number of volunteers and donors who support those nonprofits and who believe in that work answer the response to a call for help in emergencies." Refugee-serving organizations in Dallas emphasize the importance of efforts from the community to continue to support refugees. When asked about community support for their organization, Nasrin from ICNA said, "The community has been the biggest reason we do well. It's all so important to make a difference. We cannot survive without the support of the community." Support from the community lays the foundation to create trust and connections with the Rohingya in Dallas.

Both groups rely heavily on their local communities to build a sense of trust and connection within and to their host society, especially in instances where the local government fails to create meaningful connections. In the case of Lewisville, local community members were involved in the creation of protective spaces for the Chin immediately after they moved to

Lewisville. In Dallas, the Rohingya had to seek out additional support from local organizations, who then became champions for their comfort and safety in Dallas.

5.3.3 Hesitations to Interact

Currently, Lewisville struggles with overcoming barriers to creating relationships with the Chin. There is a deep fear among the Chin of becoming Americanized and losing their culture. In Myanmar, the Chin faced ethnic and religious persecution, making their church and cultural leaders distrust people in positions of power and authority. Becky Nelson, founder of the Chin Community Ministry, who witnessed the distrust from the community first-hand said, “Many of the [Chin] pastors did not really want friendship, they were afraid of friendship because they were frightened the Chin were gonna lose their identity.” After years of abuse from Myanmar’s national government, losing the ability to teach their language in schools, and the systematic destruction of their churches, the Chin cling tightly to their culture. Ye, a young Chin refugee who traveled from the Chin state to Malaysia, and eventually the United States with his family, elaborated on his experiences living in Myanmar under military rule:

Americans don’t understand. The military was very bad. Every day I fear[ed] for my family, for my church, for everyone that I know. I never [knew] if someone [was] going to come back when they [went] out. When we came here, we refused to go back to before. I will never lose my culture to anyone again.

Experiences in Myanmar made the Chin respondents cautious and distrustful of outsiders. Ye emphasized this sentiment when speaking about life in the Chin State, “At home [in Myanmar] we could not trust anyone. The military government took everything from our families.” These feelings of anxiety lead the older generation of Chin respondents to avoid interactions with the white population in Lewisville. Chin respondents also possessed a fervent desire to blend in with the community, to not stand out, and to not receive special treatment. When discussing relationships among Chin and the rest of Lewisville, Hla said, “We’re a very

introverted community I guess I could say we don't really like to reach out for help.”

Overcoming these barriers and creating new relationships lie at the heart of current city outreach in Lewisville, as well as among refugee-serving organizations in the city.

Like other refugee groups, the second generation of Chin refugees feel more comfortable and more integrated with the local population, although they still feel barriers to connecting with the local community. Nu, a young Chin refugee who works for the school district, asserted that Lewisville’s local population “do not know what to do with us. We are members of the community now, but we are so different.” There is a general sentiment that Lewisville’s white population still grapples with a perception of the Chin as only refugees in need of help rather than part of Lewisville’s future. Lian felt that people in Lewisville struggle to see past the Chin’s refugee status: “They still see who we were when we came, but now we stand on our own without needing extra help.” To help combat this, the school district continues to work to break down persistent perceptions of the Chin as just refugees. Andy Plunkett, the Chief of High Schools for the Lewisville Independent School District, and the Chin festival remain at the heart of this transformation. His desire to change the perception of Chin youth was reflected throughout his interview as he spoke about his experiences working as the Principal of one of Lewisville’s high school campuses.

There's always a thing with refugees with the communities like thinking of them as being like you know poor, pitiful, they need our help, and now the school district is really pushing something new. Like, of course, they've gone through horrible things but look at where they've accomplished and where they're going. Now we have so many that have already graduated from college and that are doing wonderful things and we want people to see that.

Although creating new connections and forming new understandings of the Chin will take time, efforts exist to bring the communities together through events such as the Chin Cultural Festival and smaller city events that encourage cross-cultural connections.

Dallas faces similar issues with creating connections to the Rohingya, fear of interaction builds upon issues with feeling lost in the multitude of refugees the city (see above). This leads to disenfranchisement among the Rohingya. When asked about the level of support he felt from the city government, Aye said, “they don’t know me, I am just another face in the crowd. I am someone to be pitied and out on posters, not cared about.” Many of the Rohingya felt like a face in a crowd and that city officials did not understand their needs. The Rohingya are the most public targets of Myanmar’s military government, facing accusations of illegal immigration and persecution for their ethnicity. Taleb gravely expressed the reality for Rohingya in Myanmar, “The government want us dead. They want no more Rohingya in Myanmar.” As a result, the majority of the Rohingya respondents expressed worries over losing their safety in the United States. During a conversation about his time in Dallas and how he felt about the city, Saiful expressed the hatred he experienced in Myanmar and when in a Bangladesh refugee camp, “In Myanmar, I am hated. In Bangladesh, I am hated. How can I feel safe in the United States?” Their Muslim faith also presents worries for the Rohingya. Sheikh worried acutely for other Muslim women, “I have not experienced any hate, but I have heard the stories. People here hate Muslims and Muslim women.” Fear for their safety creates the largest barrier between the Rohingya and the community of Dallas. To combat some of these worries, the WCIAD of Dallas works hard to promote a welcoming community for immigrants and refugees in the city. Cristina da Silva, its Division Head, stated that they city worked on programming to help people who had concerns about Muslim Afghan refugees understand the process of vetting when it comes to

achieving refugee status, "...that's actually another piece of our website is helping people understand that there is a lot of background checks and a lot of investigations that immigrants and refugees that goes through the asylum process."

Despite their hesitations to interact with the American population, the Rohingya create strong connections with each other and fellow refugees in Dallas. When asked about her friends in the refugee community, Khadija said that originally, she knew few people in the community but, "when you have no one else you know, no one who knows your language, you sort of get close to one another." The Rohingya created a tight social network, meeting together to provide advice and support to new arrivals. Yet, barriers remain between the Rohingya and the local population of Dallas. Mohib stressed the difference between the two groups: "They are not like us. We are not like them. It is hard to make friends." Several Rohingya felt that the American population could not understand their experiences as refugees and therefore could not become part of their community. While connections currently remain limited, the Rohingya hope for a place in the community. Zura proclaimed that she believed that the Rohingya would make relationships shortly, saying, "We are a strong people, things are hard, but we will find a place. I think soon we will make friends with everyone, and they will see who we really are." The hope is that as time progresses, these wounds will heal, and the younger generation will form connections to their host community.

5.4 Identity and Sense of Belonging

Themes of identity and belonging appeared throughout the interview process. Many of the refugees interviewed felt a loss of identity because of their refugee status and movement out of Myanmar. As a result, both groups struggle with finding an identity and sense of belonging in their resettlement locations, though to different extents. Rohingya respondents noted feeling

intensely out of place in Dallas. The Chin have the advantage of having chosen Lewisville, which improves their connection to the community and provides a stronger sense of identity. Each group creates unique spaces in their resettlement cities to cultivate identity and belonging. This section discusses the themes of identity and belonging and how they impact refugees' connections to their resettlement location.

5.4.1 Identity and a Lack of a Sense of Belonging

When asked about their comfort with living in Dallas, all the Rohingya participants expressed feelings of placelessness and a lack of feeling at home. The Rohingya are currently the largest stateless population in the world (ISI, 2020). 930,000 Rohingya reside in refugee camps in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. In their time in Dallas, this feeling of statelessness intensifies. When asked about what could change to make Dallas feel more like home, Aye said, "I have no home, no place in Burma, no place in Bangladesh, I belong nowhere." Ideas of belonging appeared frequently in interview responses. When asked about the level of support felt by the city, Wai expressed the differences between an inclusive environment and one you belong in, "The city talks about inclusivity, but I do not feel like I belong here. I do not want to be included in a place where I do not belong." Part of these responses stemmed from feelings of being lost in the mix of refugees in Dallas. In response to questions of help from the city and local resources, Abul said, "There are so many of us [refugees]. They try to help everyone but how can they really know us and what we need? There are not very many Rohingya here, we are very small, and others are much bigger." Another reason brought up is the need to assimilate to American culture and speak the local language. Chit commented on how the inability to speak the Rohingya language with locals made him feel more separated from the city and more separate from his home country and culture, "No one knows my language; I must speak English

to fit in. I lose more of being Rohingya this way.” These experiences intensified feelings of statelessness among the Rohingya.

The Chin felt their statelessness as well, but to a lesser extent than the Rohingya. When asked what could change to make Lewisville feel more like home, every Chin refugee responded that Lewisville is their home, but still missed Myanmar and their community in the Chin State. When discussing how she felt living in the United States, Lun said, “Lewisville is home, but it is not the Chin State. I miss being at home, with our village, with the people that I know.” While many of the Chin associate Lewisville with their home, their ideas of belonging and nationality remain with Myanmar and the Chin State. Deep connections to their home state and desire to return punctuated conversations. Than expressed his connection to the Chin State as a sense of belonging, “I live here, but I will always belong to the Chin State. Someday I hope to return, but right now there is no place for us.” These reduced feelings of placelessness are partially attributed to time, as the Chin have lived in Lewisville for 15 years, more than double the amount of time the Rohingya have lived in Dallas. However, another explanation is the Chin’s ability to create their own spaces in Lewisville and their belonging to the city.

5.4.2 Creating Identity

Both the Chin and Rohingya deal with the loss of their home country and contend with feelings of statelessness in their resettlement communities. However, these feelings of statelessness are reduced as each refugee group carves out spaces in their cities that feel like their own. For the Rohingya, there are certain stores and cafes where they meet where no other refugees or groups meet, thus providing them with their own spaces. Mohib elaborated on his experiences in finding place in Dallas, “We have a store in town that [an older refugee] opened. You can go there for food or to just talk to people. It can make you feel safer, more at home.”

These spaces provide a sense of place for the Rohingya, especially when they feel lost in the mix of refugees in the city. Sheikh spoke of an apartment in her complex where she knows the door is always open to the community to foster a sense of home, “Nowhere here is for us alone, but when we are together, things are good. It is warm and you can picture being back home.” This re-creation of home provides a safe place for Rohingya refugees to decompress, experience feelings of care, and connect to fellow refugees. The city is starting to make strides towards creating places of inclusion in the city to complement those made by refugees. Gay Willis concedes that current efforts from the city lack representation for all refugee groups, but new efforts such as the Dallas International District, which aims to turn the old Valley View Mall into a multicultural development, will hopefully create new spaces for refugees to find an identity in the city.

The Chin have been able to establish a stronger presence than the Rohingya. This is in part because of their longer residence time in Lewisville, but also because of community support for the Chin. The Chin have opened eight churches in Lewisville, along with a grocery store, multiple restaurants, and other local businesses. When discussing her favorite places in Lewisville, Nu proudly discussed Chin businesses, “Our restaurants are so good, you know everyone in there. Church is really the big one though, when you go to church it’s like all the worries of the week go away.” Community action such as the efforts of the CCM, and the volunteer efforts of a local business lawyer made these businesses possible. Extensive community support from Lewisville continues to encourage the Chin to increasingly feel a sense of identity with the city.

5.4.3 Choosing Where to Belong

Rohingya respondents felt forced into staying in Dallas. As a state settled refugee group, the expectation is that they remain in Dallas to continue receiving their benefits and so that the government knows where they are. While Dallas provides necessary benefits to refugees, the inability to choose where they live creates feelings of dispossession for the Rohingya. Part of these feelings stem from their statelessness and abuse in Myanmar. The Rohingya felt like they had nowhere else to go, and for their safety remained in Dallas, Taleb conceded, “I am here because where else do I go? There is nowhere else for me in this world.” A desire to have somewhere they could make their own also appeared in interviews. Khadija said, “I think everyone wishes we could have somewhere that is ours. We couldn’t have a place in Myanmar or in Bangladesh because people hate us. I think we would be happy if we could have somewhere that was ours.” Acute feelings of statelessness, lack of spaces to make their own, and absence of belonging to their resettlement location compound to inhibit placemaking practices among the Rohingya.

The Chin chose Lewisville to be their resettlement place. As their main religious group moved from Dallas to Lewisville, and as they gained resources and confidence in Lewisville, their group size increased. As Becky Nelson describes it, “They would get set up with an apartment in Dallas and only a few days later they would come to Lewisville.” Rapidly this presence brought community support and assistance since the Chin have access to all the local resources with little to no competition. This means that they have had the means and support from local citizens to create their own spaces in Lewisville. Having support from the local community proved vital for the Chin, as leaving Dallas meant leaving state benefits and a secure resettlement location. The city acknowledges this sacrifice, which James Kunke explained as,

“The Chin chose Lewisville. When they moved here, they gave up their benefits for housing, food, everything.”

When asked what could change to make Lewisville more like home, every Chin respondent replied with something to the effect of “Lewisville *is* home.” Hla discussed the transition period of Lewisville’s acceptance of the Chin, “I think it took the city a long time realize that we are here to stay but now they know, and we are here. It is our home.” As time has progressed, the city has slowly begun to join in the process of creating a Chin identity in Lewisville. The city sponsors and promotes Chin national day, they have translated documents into the Hakha Chin language, and have increased their English as a Second Language support. The Chin’s connection to their community also relies on religion, as Lun noted, “Our church and life are here now.” This religious connection provides the Chin with community support and contributes to their sense of belonging in Lewisville.

5.5 Role of Religion

Throughout the resettlement process, religion intertwined with people’s lives. Respondents reflected on how their religious beliefs and faith impacted their resettlement experiences and how religion provided a sense of comfort and empowerment during an uncertain period. Furthermore, religion created avenues for each group to connect with and establish a sense of belonging in their host communities. The Chin expressed how their Baptist faith solidified their position in the city while the Rohingya relied on their faith to improve their access to resources. This section investigates how religious practices and faith-based organizations shape and provide comfort during the resettlement process.

5.5.1 Religious Practices

Both the Chin and Rohingya respondents expressed a deep connection to their faith and attributed their success and survival to their continued religious practices throughout their resettlement process. When refugees felt lost during their transition to the United States, they relied on faith to sustain them and persevere. Su Su smiled as she explained her reasoning for maintaining her faith, even during the period when her family fled Myanmar, “When you lose everything, your home, your friends, you have to rely on God.” The ability to maintain these religious ties remained vital during their transition period to the United States. Lun described why her family maintained their faith while waiting in a refugee camp in Malaysia, “we didn’t know what was going to happen, so we prayed every day.” The Rohingya, who experience even greater religious persecution in Myanmar, held onto their faith and felt relieved in their ability to practice their religion in the United States. Chit remarked on how he felt when he realized he could go to mosques in Dallas, “I was so happy to hear they had mosques in the city, that I could go without fear.”

Additionally, religious practices created transnational ties to the home country and home states, helping each group feel less isolated. In Lewisville, Chin church services closely resemble those held in the Chin State. Nu clarified how and why these services mimicked those in Myanmar, “We hold our church services in Hakha Chin this helps us feel like we are back home even just a little bit.” While imitating church services in the Chin State, the Chin also incorporated American religious practices such as surrounding music. Lian described one way this mixing occurs, “The young people in our church have started our own band with guitars and drums.” By incorporating Chin tradition and new forms of religious celebration, Chin youth facilitate a transcultural experience.

The Rohingya felt similar ties to their home in the Rakhine States and expressed the safety of being able to celebrate their faith in the U.S. Aye recounted the almost transformative feelings experienced when entering the Rohingya mosque in the apartment complex laundromat, “When you come to the mosque, you can be home in a way. There is no Dallas, U.S., or Myanmar, just other Rohingya and our faith.” This provided not only connections to home, but also a feeling of safety and protection in an unfamiliar location. Wai summarized her feelings about the ability to continue Muslim practices in the United States, “There is something safe and sacred in being able to continue prayer.” These transnational ties to Myanmar through their religious practices helped each group feel more assured in their identities and reduced feelings of placelessness and hopelessness in difficult periods.

Religious practices functioned as the main connector for both groups of refugees to important networks in their host cities. The Denton County Baptist Association facilitated the connection of the Chin Evangelical Church to the Flower Mound First Baptist Church, which eventually formed the Chin Community Ministry. The Ministry also became the primary contact for Chin students and the school system, helping students register for school faster than state programs do. In Dallas, the Rohingya found Muslim Organizations like Ma’Ruf and INCA-Dallas which helped them connect with other Muslims in the city. Taleb remarked on how excited he was to meet other Muslims in the city, “We didn’t think that there would be many Muslims in Texas, we are happy to not be alone.” In both cases, faith functioned as cross-cultural connections. However, because the Rohingya are state-settled, they had to actively seek out these organizations and the support that they offered. A community-based element to resettlement might improve their access to the large number of faith-based resources in Dallas. These

religion-based refugee organizations are known as faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and played major roles in the resettlement of refugees in DFW.

5.5.2 Faith-Based Organizations

Upon resettlement in DFW, both groups connected to faith-based organizations (FBOs). These organizations took on the role of providing resources that state organizations failed to meet. During their resettlement period, FBOs provided not only vital resources but also spaces for religious practice and community connections in their resettlement cities.

The Chin's relationship with FMFBC gave birth to the Chin Community Ministry, a faith-based organization with the goal of providing resources to the Chin as they moved from Dallas to Lewisville. One major resource was the church building itself, offered to the Chin Evangelical Church to hold services. Pau spoke about her experiences as the church established itself in Lewisville, "when we started having our own church services, it felt like we had power over our lives again. Now we have church services available to our people and we let other refugees use our building for their church services." As the Chin established their church (and multiple subsequent churches) in Lewisville, they extended the hospitality they got from American churches to other refugees who needed a space for their faith practice. While the expansion of faith spaces is smaller in Dallas, Ma'Ruf helped the Rohingya negotiate with the property owner of their apartment complex to allow them to rent out the former laundry room to create a mosque that was uniquely their own in the city. Mohib emphasized how important the ability to celebrate their religion in the United States is to the community, "We couldn't worship freely in Myanmar, we had to make do in the camps, and now we have a safe space where we can worship how we want to." These types of local organization assistance play a large role in providing comforting faith spaces for the Rohingya.

In addition, FBOs focused on filling the gaps in resources each refugee group needed. State organizations address the basic needs of refugees but often neglect social and cultural needs. While the state provided rent assistance, they did not provide furniture for refugees, which prompted the creation of the furniture ministry of the Chin Community Ministry. Becky Nelson recalled with fondness the conversation that led to the furniture ministry, “Pastor Mang was the most worried about furniture. He said, ‘They sleep on the floor just like they did in camps. They are in America now, and they need furniture.’ He made that clear, so we started traveling all around trying to find furniture for them.” Similarly, Ma’Ruf and the INCA-Dallas changed their programming to meet the transportation needs of the Rohingya. Which led to caseworkers teaching driving lessons and helping families locate reliable transportation to and from work. Meeting physical needs outside of federal benefits is a major part of the programming for faith-based organizations in both cities. Beyond meeting these physical needs, the faith-based organizations promoted connections between refugees and the local community through religion. The Chin Community Ministry matched Chin families to American families, who often attended church together or celebrated Christmas and Easter together. Lun recalled the experience of having their American family with hers as a child “[the family] ended up being our close friends. During our first Christmas, they came over with a tree and a nativity and taught us some Christmas Carols in English.” Connections to other Baptists in the area allowed the Chin to lay the groundwork for long-term relationships with the community of Lewisville. The Rohingya received similar connections to the Muslim community in Dallas, and the size of the city and diverse population allow them to access faith-based resources at a large scale.

The greatest difference between these two resettlement sites is the timing of these resources. In a traditional state resettlement model, refugees are not matched with a similar faith

organization. Therefore, the Rohingya sought out these organizations anywhere from a few months to a year after their initial resettlement. In contrast, once the Chin settled in Lewisville, new Chin families could immediately access faith-based resources as the CCM functioned as their primary settlement agency.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF STATE AND COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

This study examines the ways in which resettlement strategies impact the success of Burmese refugees in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex (DFW). I compared two settlement strategies: community versus state (Figure 6.1). Through qualitative case studies of two Burmese refugee groups living in DFW, I found that refugees settled following a community-based resettlement model often have more positive outcomes than refugees settled through the traditional, state-supported settlement method. Refugees who chose their location experience shared connections and integration with their host society more than those who did not choose their site of resettlement. However, the large-scale assistance that federal resettlement offices offer is necessary to generate positive refugee resettlement, and community sponsorship is not always an appropriate method for resettlement. This section discusses the differences in the state versus community settlement process, highlighting differences in access to services, connections among refugees and their host community, and the role of active participation in the resettlement process while emphasizing the need for a combined system of refugee resettlement that pairs federal resources with community outreach and assistance (see figure 6.1). In this proposed method, refugees would be paired with an NGO and a community sponsorship group. By using this method refugees could draw upon both sets of resources during their resettlement and still create lasting bonds to encourage further assistance after the formal state aid period ends. The experiences of the Chin, who first received state benefits in Dallas and then moved to Lewisville and received community assistance, embodies the importance of using both state and community resources to facilitate positive resettlement experiences.

Proposed Combined Resettlement Method

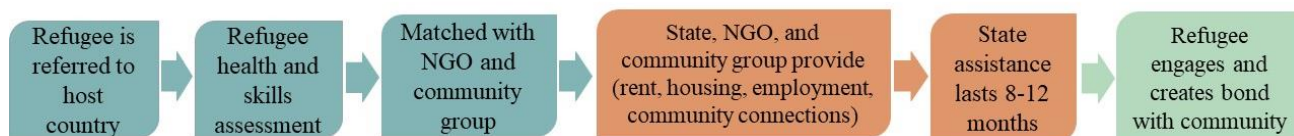


Figure 6.1: Proposed method of combining community sponsorship and state resettlement

6.1 Services

In the traditional refugee resettlement model, NGOs hold the responsibility of providing refugee services. In the U.S., this assistance comes in the form of cash, language, housing, healthcare, and job assistance. Typically, these service provisions last eight to twelve months, leaving refugees to find local-level resources once their state benefits run out, which researchers often refer to as “filling the gap” (e.g., Frazier, 2021). In the community sponsorship model, the local citizens that comprise the community sponsorship group take responsibility for providing for refugee needs, while helping refugees continue to access federal resources such as Medicaid and CHIP. Community-provided resources last from twelve to twenty-four months, but often extend beyond the formal resettlement period as refugees connect to the local community and their sponsors continue to check on them (Lanphier, 2003). While the Chin came to Lewisville through secondary migration, CCM followed many community sponsorship methods while helping settle the Chin. Reflecting this, the Chin Community Ministry’s Family Matching Program encouraged connections where the American families continued to stay connected with their refugee families, attending weddings, funerals, and other important social events. The benefits provided by community sponsorship extend far beyond formal assistance by providing for the social and emotional needs of refugees.

To highlight the ways that the community model can better serve refugees, in Figure 6.2, I combine the services offered by the Chin Community Ministry (columns) with Jenny Phillimore’s (2021) five local opportunity structures (rows). Examining the phases of the ministry in this way highlights the focus of each phase. While the earliest phases of the ministry emphasized meeting needs in terms of initiatives and support, locality, and acculturation stress, these reduce over time, instead focusing on the relationship-building aspects of relations and discourse. This demonstrates the relationship-based nature of community sponsorship models, which work to provide for only the physical but also the cultural and social needs of refugees. These programs, created with the Chin community, also demonstrate the specificity and breadth of efforts made by community sponsorship groups when resettling vulnerable populations. Many of these services reflect those offered through federal programs, and if paired with federal benefits, could create even more opportunities for refugees to seek the resources they need.

	Establish	Equip	Engage
Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic School Issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenant Issues • School Buddies • Family Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Buddies • Family Mentoring • New Arrival Christmas Decorating Parties • Participation in Chin Community Events
Locality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Residency and Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Ownership Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Ownership
Discourse		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chin Good Neighbor Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Council Meetings • Chin Military Coup Protest
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resettlement Agency Liaison • Financial Assistance Referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESL/Citizenship Courses • Learn to “Navigate the System” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move Towards Internal Sustainability
Initiatives and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chin Clinic- Denton County Health Department • Furniture Ministry • Clothing Give Days • Medical Outreach • Rent Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer Reading Program • Basic Medical Instruction • Tutoring • Back to School Paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Assistance to Students for Extracurriculars • Student Encouragement • New Baby Baskets
Acculturation Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Management • Translation Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Management • Translation Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Orientations

Figure 6.2 The Chin community Ministry’s three phases of resettlement (columns) with programs sorted by Jenny Phillimore’s (2020) Local Opportunity Structures (rows).

During each phase of resettlement, communities can target more appropriate organizational activities. These vary through time, as Figure 6.2 demonstrates. At the point of initial resettlement, refugees require resources that target their physical needs such as housing, healthcare, and employment. These support services largely fall into the categories of initiatives and support and locality. Then, as time progresses and refugees become more established in the community, resources can pivot to foster relationships between them and their host community, moving from a large number of initiatives and support services (five in the beginning stage) to only three by the time refugees have hit the engagement phase of resettlement. While services and resources directed at addressing basic needs decrease, the services that encourage sustained success increase. The category of relations, which emphasizes relationships and connections to the host community, increases the most over time, from only one service offered in the establish phase to it being the largest category in the engagement phase. This method generally encourages more sustainable success and it attempts to eventually have the refugee-serving organization reduce its role in providing resources to allow refugees to create internal support services. In the face of deteriorating support for refugees, using a community-based model after federal benefits end could improve the long-term integration of refugees.

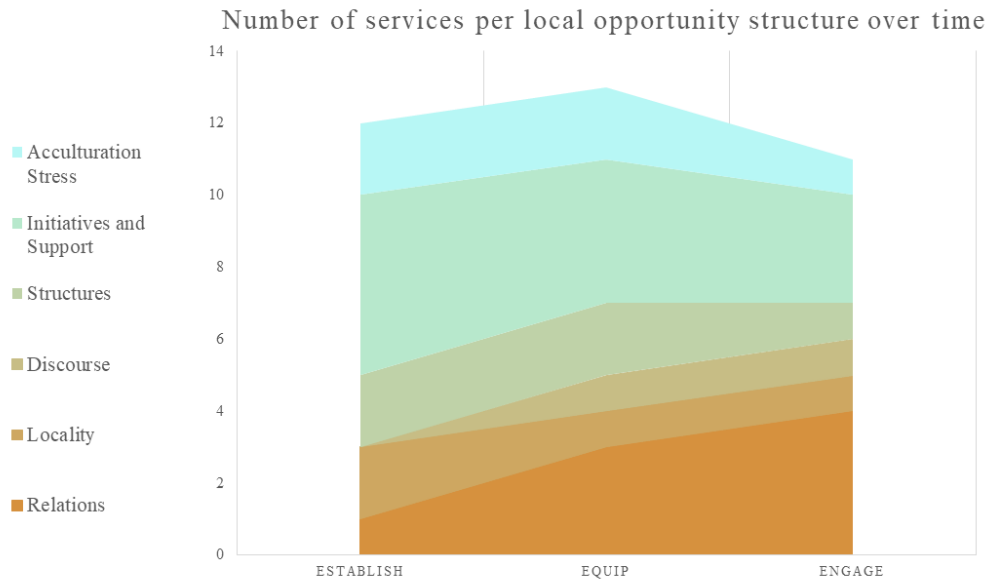


Figure 6.3: The number of programs offered by the Chin Community Ministry over time per Local Opportunity Structure

As figures 6.2 and 6.3 demonstrate, community sponsorship encourages the creation of a resource social network for refugees over phases. Research demonstrates that with a growing desire to support refugees, state resettlement organizations struggle to effectively utilize community resources in settlement (Fratzke & Dorst, 2019). When resettlement moves to the hands of the local community, service provisions are better understood by refugees. Building on scholarship on the flexibility of local-level community resettlement resources (Boese & Phillips, 2017), my thesis shows how the Chin Community Ministry was able to create a large network of service resources for the Chin. These resources went beyond those provided by traditional resettlement methods, including provisions for mental healthcare, financial planning and tax assistance, and cultural resources. Additionally, the Chin Community Ministry wielded its resources effectively; for example, the ministry collaborated with school administrators to help enroll the Chin students in school faster than Refugee Services of Texas could. My research

supports other work that shows how refugee-serving organizations (RSOs) fill critical gaps in assistance for refugees (Garkisch et al. 2017; Sunata and Tosun 2019). Additionally, the principal needs that these organizations fill are in the categories of social inclusion and well-being. For example, the Chin Community Ministry facilitated church services and assisted in starting the Chin Cultural Festival in Lewisville. Additionally, RSOs filled vital gaps in assistance needs for the Rohingya when state programs fell short. These organizations, and their services, drastically improved the resettlement experiences of both refugee groups. Implementing community sponsorship from the point of first arrival is likely to increase resource access and community networks instead of refugees seeking them after they arrive as in the state sponsorship model. More broadly, because these small-scale organizations play a large role in resettlement processes, there should be further investigations into their efforts and motivations, to understand which local organizations facilitate community sponsorship and how they do this.

As evidenced in the Rohingya's experiences, although state-sponsored refugees can draw upon local resources, they take up the task of seeking out community resources rather than having them provided at the point of first arrival. The Rohingya connected with local organizations that provided targeted resources and casework, but had to actively seek these resources out, which increased levels of frustration and stress when adapting to life in Dallas. By providing local resources at the point of first arrival, community sponsorship minimizes the stress that refugees experience and allows resettlement communities greater access to service resources like Medicare and Medicaid. With local organizations embedded in the resettlement process, there is more likelihood for positive impacts on refugee resettlement outcomes (Walton-Roberts, et al., 2019). Additionally, in the traditional settlement model, state and non-governmental organizations possess the authorization to facilitate applications for federal

resources. As a result, local organizations must learn how to help refugees navigate the application process rather than providing direct assistance and application facilitation. When discussing the potential of community sponsorship with Christina Da Silva, the inability to effectively facilitate assistance applications remained the main barrier for Dallas to implement a community sponsorship model.

As community sponsorship encourages refugees and their local community to foster connections through services, it fosters one-on-one connections with community members. When refugees foster connections with their local community, they not only create friendships but also pull upon the skills and resources of their new community contacts (Gonzalez-Benson, 2021). In Lewisville, local community members piloted programs to go beyond state programs to provide for needs such as financial advice and cultural services. Andy Plunkett, who rapidly formed bonds with Lewisville's high school-aged Chin population through the Chin Club, saw the need to allow students to test out of their foreign language requirement with Hakha Chin. Without the relationship encouraged by Lewisville's community-centered approach, the need would have gone unnoticed. Additionally, studies highlight that in the process of continuing care for resettled refugees, there is a general desire to facilitate relationships to encourage successful social integration (Frazier, 2021). The Chin Community Ministry demonstrated this with its Family Mentoring Program that paired Chin families with local families. Participants whose families joined the program remembered it fondly and Nu even maintained a connection with her Lewisville family while she attended college, and they sent her care packages to remind her of home. However, while expanded resources greatly assisted the Chin, Becky Nelson and a few Chin respondents pointed out the tendency for American members of the CCM to view themselves as saviors, which led to tension in some interactions. Working through these views,

having resources on federal and community levels, and encouraging collaboration and equal footing between refugees and their community sponsors is vital for maintaining long-term relationships and success in resettlement.

Another key part of the community that allows for the development of specific resources is the outreach of FBOs. During the interview period, refugees emphasized the importance of faith during their resettlement, and FBOs offered services to provide for their physical and spiritual needs. In addition, refugees felt more comfortable seeking help from organizations with which they shared a faith. Research finds that refugees sponsored by religious groups experience better economic and social outcomes than refugees who only access assistance from government resettlement agencies (Ives et al., 2010). This is in part because of the comfort in reaching out to a shared faith community and because of the strengthened ties to the host population. Because of the sponsorship of the Flower Mound First Baptist Church, the Lewisville Chin rapidly gained connections to the Baptist population in the area, who became advocates for the Chin. This is largely in part because of the predominance of Christianity in the South. These advocates participated politically to encourage policy and city programming, like Chin Good Neighbor Project, to assist the Chin. This is consistent with research that emphasizes FBOs can provide resources and assistance as accurately and close to the people in need as possible (e.g. Cecil et al., 2018). In interviews, the Chin expressed closer connections to the population of Lewisville than the Rohingya expressed in Dallas. Religious community advocates also facilitated support for economic endeavors among the Chin, which led to increased business ownership. Community sponsorship not only allows these connections to form but in fact encourages FBOs to participate in the resettlement process (Macklin et al., 2018).

In addition to their ability to integrate refugees economically and socially, Wilson (2011) similarly shows that FBOs possess a capacity for greater hospitality towards and sensitivity to refugees' beliefs and spiritual welfare. Programming by the Chin Community Ministry encouraged mental healthcare and religious practices reducing acculturation stress among the Chin. Later, their connections to the community allowed them to reach the resources necessary to open not just one, but multiple Chin churches in Lewisville. Additionally, FBOs such as Ma'Ruf and the Islamic Circle of North America-Dallas (INCA) functioned as the main caseworkers for the Rohingya outside of RSTX. Programming changes occurred through their tight-knit relationships with their caseworkers, who maintained close ties to their families even after the casework ended. Caseworkers noted key issues the Rohingya faced and advocate for services to meet those needs, such as driving lessons. However, this was not a universal experience for Rohingya refugees, and because they had to seek out these organizations, there were not able to expand their use in the same way as the Chin were able to in Lewisville. Nevertheless, future studies could examine the motivations of faith-based organizations to determine if motivations for refugee resettlement center on goals of proselytizing or otherwise, for example, and if these organizations actually create lasting, beneficial bonds with refugee groups.

Through the interview process, it became evident that creating relationships transformed the resettlement experience. In this process, communities redefine the contractual assistance of refugees into a long-term relationship, not just providing services, but providing social connection beyond what resettlement agencies offer. These connections promote the formation of a community, which is paramount to the social integration and comfort of refugees living in the United States. In agreement with other studies, this research argues that the mutual, two-way

exchange and formation of relationships between resettled refugees and American citizens, paired with increased resource access is key to successful resettlement outcomes (Frazier, 2021).

6.2 Community Connections

This research points to the importance of the role of the local community in resettlement. In the traditional resettlement model, the government determines refugee resettlement locations based on city quotas and sometimes on whether a similar refugee group lives in the area (RSTX, 2022). However, this method does not guarantee that refugees will have a shared connection to the host community. Research demonstrates that when programs integrate or match refugee choice in resettlement decisions, improves refugee mental health and connection to their host community (Ermansons et al., 2023). Rohingya respondents repeated that they felt stuck in Dallas, with no choice in where they ultimately ended up, because of fear of losing their access to federal resources. The ability of the Chin to choose Lewisville not only provided a sense of belonging to the city but also increased participation in civic responsibilities such as voting and working on community projects such as Keep Lewisville Beautiful. Then, because of this feeling of ownership and involvement in the community, there is a decrease in the threat that a host community feels when confronted with a refugee group whose culture is vastly different (Esses et al., 2017). By matching refugee and resettlement community characteristics, the community method uses a sponsorship model that lessens this symbolic threat (Jones & Teytelboym, 2017). Lewisville city leaders admitted that their original hesitation to intervene in Chin affairs stemmed from the concern that the Chin were only in the city temporarily, and once they noted that the Chin planned to remain in Lewisville and become citizens they increased their efforts to interact with and improve relations with the Chin community.

As they welcome and integrate refugee populations, local-level governments also possess the flexibility to provide for refugee needs (Boese & Philips 2019), which builds upon the resources provided by the federal government for resettlement (Careja, 2019). Federal-level provisions for refugee services are rigid, with restrictions on who, where, and for how long refugees can receive assistance (Brown & Scriber, 2018). Local governments can create more flexible policies with specific refugee needs in mind. The inclusion of ethnic group representatives in policy decision-making can further facilitate this process. Lewisville hired a



Figure 6.4: Salai Lian, Chin Community Representative to the City of Lewisville

Chin community member to improve integration and community connections (see figure 6.4). Salai, a well-known member of the Chin community, worked in tandem with Lewisville’s city council to improve relations between both groups. The smaller nature of Lewisville’s city government allowed for the creation of this position, which led to multiple programs, including translating the city’s website into Hakha Chin and efforts to bring accessible COVID-19 testing and vaccinations to the Chin community. Chin participants knew of their community representative and took pride in what he contributed to improving relations with

the city. As has been asserted, integration programs help facilitate connections between refugees and the local community, increasing the local population's involvement and advocacy (Soholt & Aasland 2019). While the Rohingya experienced some local government advocacy through the Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Division, these focused on broader refugee issues. By examining these community advocacy projects, research can advance understanding

of the political benefits of community sponsorship and how the process encourages community engagement in local political activism.

As mentioned before, another vital aspect of community sponsorship is its ability to reduce the cultural distance between refugees and their host society by conducting thorough matching programs. Resettling refugees among like communities offers greater connection and security in their cities (Bond & Kwadrans, 2022). Similarly, when the Denton Baptist Association resettled the Chin in the highly Baptist area of Lewisville, the presence of shared cultural practices reduced the cultural distance between the two communities. When I attended the Chin Cultural Festival, while the majority of attendees were Chin, there was a large number of non-Chin attendees, some of whom mentioned attending for multiple years in a row. Reduced levels of cultural distance encourage greater refugee integration and intergroup contact, which improves feelings of community (Tip et al., 2018). As James Kunke mentioned in his interview, when an online group implied that the Chin brought COVID-19 to Lewisville, non-Chin citizens of Lewisville quickly intervened to defend their community members. While a small gesture, Hla remembered how important it felt to her that people wanted to protect her community.

Studies also show that refugees and migrants who connect with their host community have greater chances of successful resettlement (Firat & Ataca, 2020). Success through connections reflects in the experiences of the Chin, who, through interactions with community members, expressed feelings of belonging to and ownership of Lewisville. Conversely, the Rohingya respondents generally had few friends outside of their refugee group and felt separated from the rest of the city. This led to respondents like Aye expressing that the local government viewed them as just another number rather than contributing members of the city. As this thesis shows, organizational and individual motivations behind community sponsorship and policy-

oriented solutions can work to equalize sponsorship opportunities while helping lower cultural distance.

While intergroup contact creates a greater sense of community for displaced people (Firat, 2020), it also improves cultural understanding between the groups. These connections reduce the impacts of post-migration living difficulties, where refugees experience barriers to accessing appropriate resources for resettlement, such as healthcare (Sangalang et al., 2018). The Chin drew on local community contacts within the Denton County Public Health organization to create a campaign to provide vaccinations and PPE for their community during the COVID-19 pandemic. When resettlement communities often struggle to understand refugees' diverse cultural perceptions of resources such as healthcare, community sponsorship encourages community leaders to connect with and understand these gaps to provide personalized resources (Benson, 2021). American members of the Chin Community Ministry spent time learning about Chin culture and Chin members remained at the center of programming to ensure that the organization delivered appropriate materials and support. Community connections also reduce acculturation stress and its reduction improves the quality of life for resettled refugees (Bond & Kwadrans 2019). However, the absence of community connections creates gaps in understanding between RSOs and refugees. In the case of Dallas, while RSOs often provided resources helpful to the Rohingya, they did not address specific needs, the biggest issue being the language barrier between Rohingya and American groups. This left many Rohingya respondents feeling stressed and anxious when attempting to navigate life in the U.S. These stressors present a significant barrier to finding a sense of community and safety in resettlement.

Faith also can play a key role in the resettlement of refugees and their connections to their host communities. While studies often highlight the role of religion in providing emotional

support (e.g., Godzdiak, 2002), only limited research addresses the role of religion in facilitating connections between refugees and their host society. In the case of the Chin, religion played the largest role in building the foundation for community integration. Currently, the majority of the population of Denton County, where Lewisville is located, practices protestant Christianity. This created a point of similarity and connection between the Chin and Lewisville's American residents. Moreover, many sponsorship groups are religious organizations that use their faith community to assist their refugee population (Nawyn, 2006). Flower Mound First Baptist Church piloted the first Family Mentorship Program with the Chin, with families working together to help make Lewisville a more comfortable resettlement location. Often these families would attend church together. Even when refugees and their host families did not share a language, faith became their form of communication. For example, the Rohingya's Muslim faith bound them to Muslim-serving organizations that provided for core needs in the community despite the lack of Rohingya organizations in Dallas. However, the elevated levels of Islamophobia in Texas discourage their full integration within the city. By implementing faith as the community connector for both refugee groups, they found organizations that actively encouraged their social integration and supported their faith needs once settled in the United States.

Although research often explains how the host community shapes the lives and behaviors of its refugees (e.g., Berry, 1989, Silove & Ekblad, 2002), resettlement is a dynamic process. Community sponsorship and refugee integration shape refugees and their resettlement communities, changing the behaviors and attitudes of policymakers and citizens (Paluk et al., 2019). This research uncovered some of the ways in which refugees change their host community while also being shaped by it. While these co-shaping processes often take years, they increase understanding between refugees and their host society and improve the acceptance

of refugees. An example of city transformation is the influence of the Chin on Lewisville's police force. In Chin culture to show respect they put their hands in their pockets and avoid eye contact. Police in Lewisville saw this as hostile or suspicious behavior, leading to higher arrest. Fortunately, that was not the end of the story. The problem led to police retraining in the city. Not only did this improve interactions between the Chin and the local police, but also improved police reactions with all citizens. In Dallas, the presence of refugees led to the creation of multiple non-profits geared towards meeting the needs of refugees. At the World Refugee Day celebration, many of these organizations were in attendance to offer their resources and back-to-school supplies to refugees in the area, no matter their religious or ethnic affiliation. Further investigations into how refugees shape their host community could provide insights into the benefits of community sponsorship.

Finally, community-sponsored refugees can create deeper interpersonal bonds with their local community (Firat & Ataca, 2020) and facilitate change than in a purely state-sponsored situation. Many community sponsorship-type models place the principle of mutually transformative relationships at their core (Good-Gingrich & Enns, 2019). These efforts suggest that community sponsorship includes integration expanding beyond basic resettlement practices to encourage interpersonal change, place change, and even systemic change. Systemic change reveals itself through the Chin Good Neighbor Project and the reduction of city citations. The city saw increased municipal citations within the Chin population and changed protocols to improve their quality of life and teach them city norms. Furthermore, the presence of refugees in Dallas shaped perceptions of refugees and migrants at the city and the individual level. City officials began the WCIAD to promote refugee and migrant issues and encourage citizens to welcome migrants into the city. Alongside this, citizens reach out and engage in refugee

assistance programs. Over time, Dallas residents became actively interested in community sponsorship programs, and citizen engagement would likely increase if the city implemented a community sponsorship program. Christina Da Silva mentioned that during an influx of Syrian refugees a few community members reached out with interest in doing a form of community sponsorship for Syrians, but complications with the Refugee Services of Texas prevented them from implementing it. This finding aligns with research that asserts that refugee resettlement strategies that place interpersonal relationships at their core create mutual transformation (e.g., Bowen et al., 2010; Frazer, 2020). Thus, the community sponsorship model of refugee integration encourages metamorphosis at all levels, from the large-scale government down to the individual citizen. To better understand how community connections transform host cities, I examine these ideas through the lens of active citizenship.

6.3 Active Citizenship

The dynamic nature of refugee resettlement shapes ideas of citizenship and belonging within a community. Through intergroup contact, resettlement redefines and reshapes ideas of what makes a citizen in the resettlement community (Nawyn, 2011). Active citizenship—or the participation in civil society, community, and/or political life (Hoskins, 2006)—encourages citizens to become involved in their local community. Increased involvement creates local-level productions of citizenship that allow refugees and migrants without legal citizenship status to participate in social constructions of citizenship (Del Castillo, 2007). The community sponsorship model activates refugees and the citizens of the host community to involve themselves in the resettlement process. Forming a community sponsorship group is an extensive process, requiring people to commit their time, energy, and social resources, which promotes a civil understanding of citizenship (Macklin et al., 2018). Civil constructions of citizenship

appeared in the community network created by the Chin Community Ministry, which extended beyond the Baptist Community, bringing multiple community actors together to create a positive resettlement experience for the Chin.

Involvement in community sponsorship lays the groundwork for creating active citizens within the community. In addition to providing necessary resources, community sponsorship groups assist refugees in the legal and civil modes of citizenship (Macklin et al., 2018). In these processes, sponsorship groups assist refugees in finding local community activities to engage in, such as local task forces or religious groups. In DFW, members of local refugee-serving organizations helped refugees navigate school board and city council meetings. The Lewisville Independent School District made efforts to translate all school documents into Hakha Chin to encourage parents to engage in their student's education. Andy Plunkett made efforts to connect to the parents of students in the Chin Club to involve them in their children's education, and soon, Chin parents began to attend school events in large numbers. During the 2020 election, a group of Chin advocates ensured that their community could access polling locations and ran a carpool service to bring families to vote. In a similar fashion, INCA-Dallas participates in Muslim Capitol Day, encouraging Texas Muslims to meet with their representatives and advocate for their needs. While none of my participants had gone to Muslim Capitol Day, they felt encouraged by the idea that other Muslims sought visibility from Texas leaders. By promoting community engagement among refugees, the sponsors and refugees intertwine themselves with the local community. During this, the citizenship process becomes available and accessible to refugees and encourages local citizens to reshape their perceptions of who is a citizen. As a result, assisting refugees in citizenship practices, and thus making them citizens, is itself an act of citizenship and shapes ideas about citizenship (Haugen et al., 2020).

Participation in active citizenship processes encourages intergroup contact between refugees and their host society and promotes citizenship camaraderie. After the initial organizing process and equipping refugees with basic needs, community sponsorship groups begin to form feelings of connection and collective identity with each other and their refugee group (Bond & Kwadrans, 2019). Working with and aiding the refugee population changes from a sense of obligation to bring genuine joy and connection to sponsorship groups (Phillimore et al., 2021). Andy Plunkett expressed the delight he experienced working with the early Chin Club in Lewisville when he was the principal of their high school, and the students still invite him back to speak at every Chin Cultural Festival. At the end of his interview, he expressed how Chin students were vital to the identity of Lewisville. The substantial number of refugees in Dallas reduces interpersonal connections between the Rohingya and other citizens, thus minimizing their attachment to the community's identity. However, the start of the Rohingya Muslim Relief organization will begin to solidify connections between the Rohingya and Dallas at large. In addition, Nasrin mentioned looking forward to further collaboration between the INCA and Rohingya refugees, hoping to build more camaraderie in the future.

As refugees begin to create to integrate socially, they build resources to encourage their economic integration. Economic integration in refugee resettlement tends to focus on the idea of self-sufficiency (e.g., Ott & Montgomery, 2015). By placing self-sufficiency at the center of resettlement, the end goal is that refugees maintain jobs to pay rent and provide for their basic needs. However, further economic integration and small business ownership often increase refugee connections to place and their community and ideas of active citizenship (Bizri, 2017). For example, as the Chin began to own physical spaces in Lewisville, their perceptions of their role in the community changed to one of ownership. Research highlights the concept of the

mixed embeddedness that refugees experience during resettlement. Not only do refugees embed themselves in ethnic networks but also within the socioeconomic and political environments of their host country. (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). In Lewisville, the Chin created organizations to help other Chin business owners, thereby creating their own economic network. Furthermore, connections with host society business owners and community members encouraged patronage of Chin businesses. These findings agree with the research that emphasizes the multiple dimensions of social capital in economic participation, thus promoting their feelings of belongingness and chances of success (Kloosterman, 2010). Business ownership turned the Chin into community stakeholders, increasing their interactions with other community members and local government entities. Similar ideas of ownership and citizenship occurred among the Rohingya, but because of a lack of local connections, they struggled to integrate into Dallas economically. Many expressed a feeling of “stuckness” in their economic position in Dallas, many working at large plants in meatpacking or cellphone assembly. Future research highlighting refugee entrepreneurship as a facilitator of social connection would increase understanding of the different avenues implemented by refugees to create a social place in their host communities.

As refugees build their active social and economic participation within their host society, they expand their resources to mitigate the impact of PTSD during resettlement. Research often examines social integration from the perspective of refugee productivity and contribution to the host community (e.g., Fratzscher & Junker, 2015). However, some studies demonstrate that social integration can reduce the stress refugees experience when resettling in the United States (Giacco et. al., 2018). After migrating to the United States, post-migration trauma is high among many refugee groups (Sangalang et al., 2018). Elevated levels of acculturation and psychological

distress can lead to health issues among refugees. However, in community-sponsored refugee groups, the community directly interacts with and contributes to the understanding of refugee culture and health, thus improving access to needs and reducing stress levels. In Lewisville, the first efforts to address refugee mental health came in the form of services aimed at addressing acculturation stress and physical needs. The furniture ministry set out to improve the physical conditions many of the Chin lived in. By providing clean, working furniture, families began to feel more secure in their resettlement. Su Su claimed that having furniture, and eventually a house, was an almost humanizing experience for her family. In refugee camps, her family slept on the ground or on small cots. Furniture provided a sense of security and worth once they moved to Lewisville. Later programs in the ministry, once the communities had established rapport, focused more directly on mental health services, connecting families to trauma counselors in the area. The Muslim community in Dallas performed similar acts for the Rohingya, with caseworkers in Ma'Ruf ensuring that families could find mental health resources when needed. While Amir admitted that while in some cases resources were stretched thin, at least the shared religion between the Rohingya and the organization made certain that mental health resources were culturally appropriate. These community efforts not only helped refugees with mental health struggles but also encouraged even future social engagement.

Furthermore, research suggests that refugees who actively socially engage in their host society experience improved mental health (Niemi et al., 2019). Lewisville's Chin population expressed the comfort of involvement in events such as the Chin Cultural Festival and other city events. Their social engagement solidified their identity as members of the community and promoted a feeling of belonging. Increased feelings of belonging improved mental health conditions for people who experienced extreme placelessness in Myanmar. Refugees in

community resettlement programs experience lowered levels of acculturation stress, and local organizations provide resources and engagement services to improve mental health and social belonging. The community sponsorship model reduces the pressure of social engagement by having community stakeholders assisting with the integration process. By having established community leaders such as Andy Plunkett working with and advocating for the Chin, they had a path to creating community events. In this way, refugees have an “in” to the community, leading to less stress when reaching out to create social connections and increasing a sense of belonging.

Finally, as refugees establish a sense of social belonging and engagement with their community, they begin to establish a sense of home. In interviews, every Chin respondent expressed the idea that Lewisville was their home, even while many continued to also view Myanmar as their home. Ahmed (1999) examines the concept of home through a co-shaping lens. Not viewing home as a static, safe place for migrants, but a dynamic experience where both the subject and space touch and shape each other. Establishing a history of community interaction through the Chin Cultural Festival began the process of cultural co-shaping. The Chin created a mark on the city through events, protests, policies, and public artwork that forever tie them to the city and will continue to shape the identity and characteristics of Lewisville. These efforts are the embodied experience of the Chin and give their presence a physical form within the fabric of the city’s history. This moves from the traditional perception of refugees as only victims, and instead agrees with Essed et al. (2004), in the idea that refugees function as actors in their own lives and experiences; creating their sense of home. The lack of ability to engage with and shape their community in Dallas restricts the co-shaping process for Rohingya refugees. When speaking about their experiences and feelings living in Dallas, many felt out of place in the city because they felt they had no influence over city and organizational decisions. However,

those who engaged with religion and RSOs expressed feeling more at ease and at home.

Expanding opportunities for refugees to create reciprocal relationships with their host community could expand social capital and feelings of home among refugees in the U.S. (Taylor, 2013).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Drawing on twenty-eight interviews with refugees, policymakers, and refugee organization leaders in the DFW Metroplex, this thesis evaluates differences in outcomes between community-sponsored and traditional state resettlement models. The community sponsorship model implements host community members to function as resettlement aides. Lewisville's community adopted a community sponsorship model when the Chin underwent secondary migration and moved from Dallas to the area, giving up many of their resettlement benefits. The Denton County Baptist Association laid the foundation for the connection between the Baptist population of Lewisville and the historically Baptist Chin. This led to the creation of the Chin Community Ministry, an organization aimed at meeting the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of the Chin as they adjusted to life in the United States. CCM worked in collaboration with federal organizations during the resettlement period, improving the resettlement experiences of the Chin over time. Through the interview process, I identify key aspects of the community sponsorship model in generating positive resettlement outcomes when paired with state resettlement resources. Additionally, I contribute to understandings of the impact of the host community on refugee resettlement and the potential of the community sponsorship model in the United States by providing an example of how communities adopt this method of refugee resettlement.

Firstly, I found that the location of resettlement and the mode of resettlement, whether community or state-settled, impacts the ability of refugees to buy homes, start businesses, and access resources specific to their needs. The traditional resettlement model often leaves gaps in services to meet refugee needs. While federal programs offer rent and housing assistance, the cultural and social needs of refugees go unmet (Brown & Scriber, 2018). As a result, refugees

must seek out additional RSOs or FBOs to fill the gap (Sunata & Tonsun, 2019). I found that the community sponsorship model provides supplemental resources from the moment of initial resettlement and thereby serves as a “bridge” to provide for more, long-term refugee needs beyond those provided by the state-sponsored traditional model. As CCM assisted the Chin in their move Lewisville, they provided not only housing and job assistance but cultural resources and assistance with long-term skills such as finance courses and higher education opportunities. The Rohingya accessed similar assistance in Dallas through their RSO and FBO caseworkers but had to make the effort to find this extra assistance, meaning some refugees remained unreached. Additionally, because those organizations provided for all Muslim refugees and migrants in the area, resources stretched thinly across multiple groups. Moreover, refugees settled in the community sponsorship model experienced lowered levels of acculturation stress and fewer difficulties in adjusting to their host society by having their needs met from the point of first arrival. Refugee resettlement aims to effectively integrate refugees into their host society (UNHCR, 2016) and this demonstrates that community sponsorship is an effective model for integration. When paired with federal resettlement resources, the community sponsorship model could create even more positive resettlement outcomes.

During the community sponsorship process, the host city government and citizens become actively engaged in resettlement, thereby creating lasting connections with their refugee group (Hyndman et al., 2021). As the Chin interacted with different city entities, they forged new bonds that promoted a sense of safety and trust. These bonds then opened opportunities to promote important issues to their community, such as preserving their culture and protesting the military coup in Myanmar. Direct influence within city departments through the Chin community representative created a legacy of cooperation and support between the communities.

In contrast, state resettlement deemphasizes the local community, focusing refugee interactions on state organizations rather than community leaders (Brown & Scriber, 2018). While Dallas promoted connections to the broader refugee population, these efforts aimed to reach multiple groups rather than working with individuals. This led to Rohingya participants feeling as though the city did not care about their needs, which led to disillusionment with the resettlement process and the city government. Social integration and trust building are key components of successful refugee resettlement (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2017) and community sponsorship allows refugees to build a stronger sense of community and connection to their host society. Pairing the state resettlement style with a community group in Dallas could allow the Rohingya to access the work of the WCIAD while also feeling a sense of connection to the city, reducing the feeling of being lost in the mix. These findings also emphasize the place-based and local nature of refugee resettlement rather than a large-scale federal one.

This research also points to the faith-based element of local-level resources for refugees and the need to investigate the role of religion in refugee assistance programs. Either from the start of their resettlement, or early on, both the Chin and Rohingya connected with faith-based organizations (FBOs) to access more resources during their resettlement. Studies argue that often FBOs function not only as resource providers but navigate political systems to advocate for refugees and their needs. In Dallas, FBOs such as Ma'Ruf and Interfaith Dallas, all actively participated in city events such as World Refugee Day. On top of showing up to events, these organization leaders communicate with and advocate for their refugee groups in city meetings. Amir, who worked with Ma'Ruf explained that the FBOs and RSOs in Dallas worked closely with city officials to bring about meaningful policy change. In Lewisville, the Chin Community Ministry worked even closer to city officials, involved in every step of policy changes and city

programming. This research agrees with studies that argue that the entanglement of religious organizations and policy warrants further exploration (Frazier, 2021). While they continue to advocate for city-wide resource improvements, FBOs increase social integration and social connections (Eby et al., 2011). These processes amplify in the community sponsorship model, which matches refugees with resettlement sites based on shared characteristics such as religion.

Furthermore, as research begins to evaluate migration as a human right (DeGenova, 2010), community sponsorship encourages more freedom and control over the resettlement process for refugees. My research points to the potential of the community sponsorship system in the United States. When communities actively involve themselves in the resettlement process, their perceptions of refugees improve, and their desire to create positive change in the lives of refugees increases. In fact, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recommends the use of the community sponsorship model as a durable solution for refugee resettlement (UNHCR, 2016). Further research into motivations for community sponsorship and ways to effectively implement the system in the United States' current resettlement program is urgent in a period of increased forced migration and reduced support for refugees. Additionally, expanding research efforts to investigate different community sponsorship contexts would provide a more robust understandings of how communities implement the method. As the United States begins to implement a community sponsorship method through the Welcome Corps (U.S. Department of State, 2023), research can help guide efforts to provide safer and more positive resettlement experiences for persecuted and placeless people seeking refuge in the United States.

Finally, I offer a deliverable chart (see figure 7.1) based on the three phases implemented by the Chin Community Ministry (see figure 5.5) when resettling the Chin population, but transforms the programming created by the ministry into broader goals for future community

sponsorship groups. In addition, it encourages conversations with the refugee community to create targeted goals that the communities can reach together rather than having the sponsorship group dictate the resettlement experience. This chart can be modified to meet the needs of different refugee groups in various locations while providing a baseline for community sponsorship groups to meet. While the resources and time needed to resettle refugees in this way are more extensive, the Chin community lives as proof that the community sponsorship method is a viable option for the United States if communities possess the willingness to engage in the resettlement process.

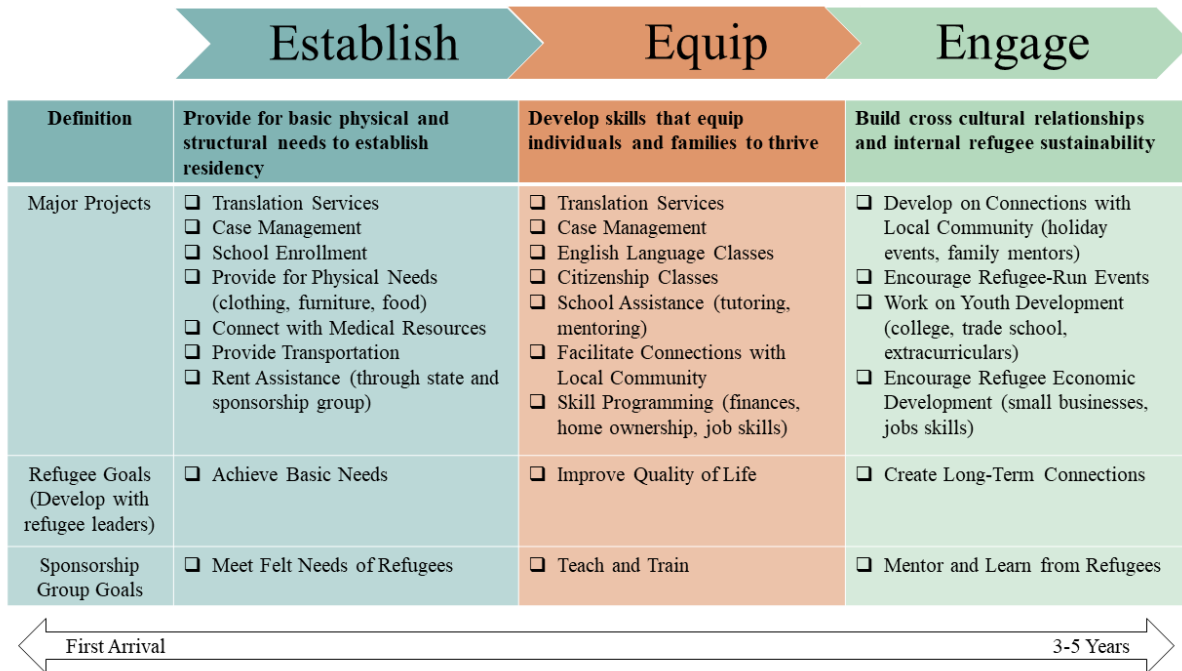


Figure 7.1: Checklist document detailing phases of community resettlement and potential services to offer in each

Ultimately, I found that the community sponsorship model offered an avenue for Lewisville’s host community to actively participate in the resettlement process, thus improving their interactions with and perception of refugees. In addition, by having the community

facilitate the resettlement process, the Chin established an identity and sense of belonging in the city. In contrast, the Rohingya's lack of community connection caused higher levels of stress and a sense of being out of place in Dallas. While the community is navigating this over time, the gaps in support present a cumbersome issue to overcome within the traditional resettlement method that restricts community groups' ability to facilitate services. Through the community sponsorship model, the Chin not only accessed unique services but created the base for long-lasting connections to Lewisville and became active citizens and participants in their resettlement, thereby empowering their community and creating a path to assist other refugee populations in the future. Currently, there are multiple efforts for the Chin to reach beyond Lewisville to other Burmese refugee groups in the area, in hopes of providing a similar sense of safety and belonging to others. Combining state and community resources to create a more comprehensive resettlement system could allow future refugee populations to find similar spaces and empowerment as they resettle in the United States.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY RUBRIC

	1- Poor	2- Fair	3- Good	4- Exceeds Standard	5- Exceptional
Locality	Little to no access to low-cost housing, integration resources, and job access and support. Resources are extremely difficult to access. Knowledge of resources is limited to non-existent	Low access to low-cost housing, integration resources, and job access and support. Many categories are missing or difficult to impossible to access. Knowledge of resources is extremely limited	Some access to low-cost housing, integration resources, and job access and support. Some categories are missing or difficult to access. Knowledge of resources is low	High access to low-cost housing, integration resources, and job access and support. They could be more diverse or need some public transportation to access, but public transportation is available	Refugees have exceptional access to a diverse amount of low-cost housing, integration resources, and job access and support. Resources are well known and easy to reach without transportation
Discourse	Media and political representations of refugees are dehumanizing and inaccurate and do not consider refugee perspectives	Media and political representations of refugees are highly polarized and sometimes inaccurate. Refugees may have a limited voice, but it is not well advertised or received.	Media and political representations of refugees are mostly accurate and positive. Refugees may have some avenues to express their perspectives, but they are less well known and received	Media and political representations of refugees are overwhelmingly positive and accurate with few exceptions. Refugees have avenues to express their perspectives but are not as well-known as others.	Media and political representations of refugees accurately and positively depict refugees and their experiences. Refugees have avenues to express their perspectives and are well seen and received by the host community.

Relations	Local and national communities are hostile to the refugee community. Intergroup contact does not occur. Refugees cannot easily interact with other refugees	Local and national communities are less receptive to the refugee community. Little intergroup contact occurs. Refugees have limited ability to interact with other refugees	Local and national communities are mostly receptive to the refugee community. Some intergroup contact is encouraged and done. Refugees have some ability to interact with other refugees	Local and national communities are receptive to the refugee community with few exceptions. A good amount of intergroup contact is encouraged and welcomed. Refugees have the ability and space to interact	Local and national communities are receptive to the refugee community. Elevated levels of intergroup contact are encouraged, welcomed, and done. Refugees have the ability and space to interact with other refugees
Structure	Integration policies at both the national and local level are extremely slow in resettling refugees and the naturalization process is difficult or impossible. Reapplying for refugee status is extremely difficult. Family reunification is impossible.	Integration policies at both the national and local level are slow in resettling refugees and the naturalization process is difficult. Reapplying for refugee status is challenging. Family reunification is exceedingly difficult.	Integration policies at both the national and local level resettle refugees and provide naturalization in a reasonable amount of time. Reapplying for refugee status can be difficult. Family reunification has some challenges.	Integration policies at both the national and local level provide quick resettlement and good access to naturalization. Reapplying for refugee status is mostly simple. Family reunification is an easy and effective process.	Integration policies at both the national and local level provide quick resettlement and easy access to naturalization. Reapplying for refugee status is simple. Family reunification is an easy and effective process.

Initiatives and Support	Little to no integration programs exist at either the national or local level. Refugees cannot create Mutual Assistance Associations	Very few Integration programs are available at both the national and local levels. Programs are not well known and may be difficult to access. Refugees cannot create Mutual Assistance Associations	Limited integration programs are available at both the national and local levels. Programs are less well known and may be hard to access. Refugees have limited resources to create Mutual Assistance Associations	Integration programs are available at both the national and local levels. Programs are well-known and may need transportation to access but transportation is available. Refugees have some resources to create Mutual Assistance Associations	Integration programs are available at both the national and local levels. Programs are well-known and easy to access without transportation. Refugees have resources to create Mutual Assistance Associations
Acculturation Stress	Refugees have extremely elevated levels of acculturation stress and no resources to manage stress	Refugees have above average levels of acculturation stress and few resources to manage stress	Refugees have average levels of acculturation stress and access to some resources to manage stress	Refugees have lower than average levels of acculturation stress and access to many resources to manage stress	Refugees have exceptionally low levels of acculturation stress and access to diverse resources to manage stress when it occurs

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDE- REFUGEES

Demographic Questions

1. Age
2. Self-identified gender
3. Employment History
4. Refugee Group
5. Length of residence in city

Grand Tour

6. Could you give me a summary of what living here is like?

Locality

7. Is it easy to find a job here?
Must travel? Hard to find places?
8. How do you get to and from work?
- A. Have you used public transportation? Do you own a car?
9. Who do you currently live with?
A. Do you have enough space where you live for that many people?
10. What social support services do you know of in the area?

Relations

11. Are you familiar with other refugees in this area? Can you describe your experiences with other refugees in the city?
12. Have you participated in any city events?
A. (e.g., City council meetings, fairs, school events)
13. Do you have friends in the city?
A. Other refugees?
B. Local citizens?
C. What types of challenges have you faced interacting with locals?

Discourse

14. How does the local news depict your refugee group?
A. Positively, negatively? Are they in the news at all?
15. How supported do you feel by the city today? Has this changed? How/why?
16. Does your community feel supported by the city government? How/why?

Structures

17. Are you the first in your family to move to the United States?
 - a. (If yes) Are there plans for you family to follow? Will they come here?
 - b. (If no) When did you reunite with your family? Where? What was the process of reuniting with your family like?

18. What resources can you access to help with citizenship or reapplying for refugee status?

A. Can you describe the citizenship process?

Initiatives and Support

19. What do you like most/least about living here? What could be changed to make living here easier?

20. Does the local refugee organization offer assistance? How?

21. Are religious services available near you? Which ones? Are these inclusive to refugees

Acculturation Stress

22. What have been some of the challenges adjusting to life here?

A. Could you describe....

B. How could things have been improved?

C. What do you like about life here?

23. Have language barriers impacted your settlement here? In what situations has language been a barrier?

24. How have you overcome some of the language and other challenges that you have encountered?

Closer

25. Is there anything that could be changed to make the city feel more like home?

Wrap Up

26. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE- ORGANIZATION LEADERS

Participant background information

1. What is your organizational role?
2. Do you live in the city where the refugee group you support is from?
3. How long have you been working within the organization?
4. Why did you get involved with the organization?

Organization Information

5. How did your organization come to be?
6. What resources does your organization offer to refugees?
7. What resources do you feel refugees in your area need the most?
8. How do you promote your services to the refugee community?
9. Do you have donor financial support? How do you get their support? Fundraisers and other activities to raise finances?
10. How do refugees access your organization? Online, travel (how), etc.

Community support/interaction

11. Do you feel like the local community (i.e., the non-refugee community) supports your organization?
 - A. Could you talk more about how your organization garnered this level of support, or how you have or plan to engage with the local community, or other outreach experiences you have had?
 - B. What civic, non-profit, private organizations support your organization? Which of these provide the strongest support?
 - C. How do you (or would you) describe the refugee group you support – for example, to someone who has never heard of them?

Wrap Up

Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE- POLICY MAKERS

Background information

1. How long have you been involved in the city government?
2. Are you familiar with the refugee community? Which refugee groups?

Community size

3. What can you tell me about the refugee group? How has it changed through time?
4. Are you involved with the refugee community? How? Do you attend events?

Discourse

5. Are you familiar with any discrimination against the refugee community in your area?
 - A. COVID-19 misinformation?
6. Have you seen media representations of the refugee groups? Like what? How are they commonly represented in the local and national media?
7. How has the refugee population changed your city?

Relations

8. Does your city have policies focused on the refugee communities? Could you describe these?
 - A. If no policies, would the local community support refugee centered policies?
9. Are refugees involved in local government? How?
 - A. A refugee representative, a translator, attending city council meetings?
10. Is government information accessible to refugees in the area? Like how?
 - A. In their language, is the website accessible?
11. Do city council members engage with the refugee population? How?

Structures

12. What federal funding can you access for refugee resettlement?
13. What do you think are the best services your city offers for refugees?

Wrap Up

Do you have any questions for me?

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