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**Welcome Home Rochester**  
**Guiding Refugees through Life in America**

By

Michael Kelly

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine  
Arts in Industrial Design

School of Design  
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology  
May 17, 2017

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**Abstract**

Rochester, NY is the third-largest city in New York State, situated on the southern shore of Lake Ontario, with a population of 210,565. Rochester is also the third largest city—after Buffalo and Syracuse—in terms of refugee resettlement. In 2016, US government resettlement and secondary migration brought 850 new refugees here. In 2017, that number is expected to pass 1,000.<sup>1,2</sup>

When refugees are resettled in the United States, the first three months of casework and assistance are provided by a federally-funded resettlement organization. After these months, however, refugees are removed from the resettlement service's caseload. In Rochester, it is at this point that a number of critical actors and organizations step in. The author has investigated one group of people who help: sponsors. Sponsors are average citizens who, on their own accord, reach out to refugee services in the area and agree to help one or more refugee families. Sponsors are guides. Currently, sponsors receive no formal training and are recruited by word-of-mouth. The author proposes a design intervention to formalize the recruitment and training of sponsors. The intervention will first raise awareness of refugees living in Rochester in hopes of attracting new sponsors. Second, the intervention will provide information on what needs to be done, how to do it, and where to find resources in Rochester.

**Keywords:** Refugees, Emotional Design, Graphic Design, Empathy, Rochester, Perceived Social Support, Website Design, Interviews

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with Mike Coniff, Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services



## **Refugees, perceived social support, and global context**

Questions of whether, why, and how to help displaced persons have become central to the domestic and foreign policies of many of the world's governments and non governmental organizations. Political and social instability drove the refugee population past 60 million in 2014, the most since WWII.<sup>3</sup> From 1995 to 2015, more than 1.5 million refugees entered the U.S.<sup>4</sup> The personal impact of displacement can be devastating. Many refugees see no prospect of returning home in the near future and must restart their lives in a new country.<sup>5</sup> On average, this situation lasts seventeen years.<sup>6</sup> Social support from local populations has been identified as perhaps the most important factor in refugees' success.<sup>7</sup> This experience is operationalized as perceived social support—an individual's feeling of the care and support their social network provides. Social connectivity, the number and strength of relationships in one's life, is a key component in perceived social support. Moreover, social connectivity has effects on the political climate of host countries. The degree of hostility from local citizens towards refugees can influence policy and spark violence which in turn is exploited by radicalizing actors.<sup>8</sup> Youth are particularly at risk, often facing the greatest discrimination and being offered the fewest social outlets.<sup>9</sup> While there are social support agencies that provide assistance to refugees, there often exists a social gap between refugees and their host country's population. A method for increasing

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<sup>3</sup> Graham 2015

<sup>4</sup> Sawyers 2016

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR 2015

<sup>6</sup> Quick 2011

<sup>7</sup> Sude et al. 2015

<sup>8</sup> Sude et al. 2015

<sup>9</sup> Knudsen 2005

social connectivity between refugees and their host populations could increase perceived social support, build mutual empathy, and ultimately help refugees to thrive.

### **The scale of displacement**

Global conflicts and the stories of the people affected by them have been defining characteristics of the beginning of the 21st century. Assessing the scale of the current crisis, though fraught with statistical and practical challenges, is an important first step in understanding the refugee experience. The UN High Commission for Refugees' most current figures, now two years old, estimate that there are more than 60 million displaced persons in the world.<sup>10</sup> Already in 2016, 135, 711 people have reached Europe by sea.<sup>11</sup> Refugees are coming from many different countries and cultures. The top ten countries of origin for first-time asylum-seekers in the EU are Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Albania, Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Iran, and Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> Hungary, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Finland, and Germany have taken in the lion's share of asylum seekers in the EU.<sup>13</sup> In the United States, most refugees come from Burma, Iraq, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan.<sup>14</sup> In the 2000s, 58,000 refugees on average have entered the U.S. each year.<sup>15</sup> Most settle in larger states including Texas, California, Michigan, and Illinois.<sup>16</sup> The most welcoming states in the last five years, relative to their

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<sup>10</sup> Graham 2015

<sup>11</sup> "Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts" 2016

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts" 2016

<sup>14</sup> Kingston 2016

<sup>15</sup> Sawyers 2016

<sup>16</sup> Guo 2015

populations, are North and South Dakota, Idaho, Nebraska, and Vermont.<sup>17</sup> Turkey is currently hosting approximately 1.9 million refugees, Jordan over 600,000, and Lebanon over one million.<sup>18</sup> The reaction of politicians and populations to this historic influx of refugees has been mixed.

### **Reactions to the refugee crisis**

Refugees seeking asylum have been met with alternately with hatred, welcome, political support, and persecution. Local populations often harbor disdain for refugees, citing concerns about the allocation of funds, security, and ideological differences.<sup>19</sup> Some Americans have called the current situation “a battle to protect our security, our country”, actively fighting resettlement organizations.<sup>20</sup> European citizens have cited the need to protect their ability to receive benefits and protect their security.<sup>21</sup> In Lebanon, refugees have been the target of violence and political imprisonment.<sup>22</sup> Public antipathy has affected policy in many ways. Twenty-six U.S. state governors have publicly spoken out against accepting Syrian refugees in their states, citing “deadly danger” and call for adding stringent requirements to the refugee screening process.<sup>23</sup> In Denmark, laws have been passed to dissuade refugees from immigrating in spite of its long

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Miliband 2015

<sup>19</sup> Briggeman 2016

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Delman 2016

<sup>22</sup> “Outstaying their welcome; Refugees in Lebanon” 2015

<sup>23</sup> Mosbergen 2015



history as an advocate for refugees.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the Danish People’s Party passed a law empowering Danish authorities to seize refugees’ assets upon entry.<sup>25</sup>

Supporters of refugees in crisis have also responded loudly. In Germany, recent polls show that 88 percent of Germans have donated clothes or money to refugees, citing in particular the impact of the Geneva Refugee Convention stemming from the plight of Jewish refugees and Germans’ experiences as refugees after WWII.<sup>26</sup> Austrians and Icelanders have both turned out to welcome refugees as they arrive and offered to house them.<sup>27</sup> In America, politicians and citizens have drawn on the immigrant history of the United States. Religious leaders including Pope Francis and congregations of American Rabbis, have called for protection and welcoming for refugees.<sup>28</sup> People see hosting refugees as a symbol of commitment to “moral and international responsibilities” and to “the side of peace”.<sup>29</sup> Individual families across the U.S. have opened their homes and businesses to provide support.<sup>30 31 32</sup> Universities in the U.S. and Europe have worked to provide refuge and education as well.<sup>33</sup> In Canada, citizens have waged media

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<sup>24</sup> Delman 2016

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bershidsky 2015

<sup>27</sup> Miliband 2015

<sup>28</sup> Mosbergen 2015

<sup>29</sup> Briggeman 2016

<sup>30</sup> Dwyer 2015

<sup>31</sup> George 2015

<sup>32</sup> Kidston 2016

<sup>33</sup> Shapiro 2015

campaigns to welcome newly arrived refugees, supported by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.<sup>34</sup>

### **Perceived social support**

The impact of reactions to the refugee crisis is more than just emotional or political. These reactions are felt as perceived social support, there subjective experience of care from one's social network. Perceived social support has strong effects on both mental and physical health. High perceived social support is consistently linked with good mental health, including lower incidence of anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation.<sup>35 36 37 38</sup> Research has shown that this effect carries through in refugee populations. In Australia, social isolation and lack of acculturation were shown particularly problematic for refugees.<sup>39</sup> Refugees from Sudan, 25% of whom reported clinically high levels of psychological distress, reported that perceived social support plays a significant role in mental health outcomes.<sup>40</sup> Physically, perceived social support plays a role in recovery from injuries and lessened mobility.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, refugees who experience racial discrimination have higher levels of depression than their counterparts.<sup>42</sup> Children are at risk in particular because they depend on their parents' experiences as well as their own.<sup>43</sup> This critical dimension of refugees' experience in their adopted countries is not

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<sup>34</sup> "Canadian children record welcome message for Syrian refugees" 2015

<sup>35</sup> Lakey 2016

<sup>36</sup> Zimet 1988

<sup>37</sup> Uchino 2004

<sup>38</sup> Neely et al. 2006

<sup>39</sup> Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, and Lacherez 2006

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Neuling and Windfeld 1988

<sup>42</sup> Noh 1999

<sup>43</sup> Morantz, Rousseau, and Heymann 2012

entirely addressed by organizations that provide mostly material support. Charities in the U.S. and Europe are mostly focused on housing, resettling, and navigating local political systems.<sup>44 45</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Charities often seek first to provide food, housing, clothing, and financial assistance.<sup>47</sup> While this is clearly important, a gap exists in the social needs of refugees. Improving perceived social support through increased social connectivity could prove a powerful addition to the services already provided to newly-arrived and long-staying refugees.

### **The path to America**

All refugees who come to the United States undergo a rigorous thirteen-step screening process. Resettlement is a permanent solution for refugees who can neither return to their country of origin nor be settled in the country that is hosting them. The screening process, broadly speaking, is a series of security checks, interviews, reviews, medical screenings, and redundant inter-agency checks. Below is a synopsis of the process as detailed by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

*Step 1:* Individuals are determined, usually by the UNHCR, to be of refugee status. A refugee is “someone who has fled from his or her home and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group”

*Step 2:* Individuals are referred to the U.S. government by the UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a trained Non-Governmental Organization.

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<sup>44</sup> “Jericho Road Community Health Center” 2016

<sup>45</sup> Catholic Charities La Cruz Community Center 2016

<sup>46</sup> Minard 2016

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2017

*Step 3:* A Resettlement Support Center (RSC), in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, collects and compiles the refugee's background information and personal data. This packet is used for background checks and presented to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in advance of an in-person interview.

*Step 4:* The State Department runs the names of all refugees through a CLASS (Consular Lookout and Support System) background check as well as additional check phased in from 2008 to 2010.

*Step 5:* Certain refugees are selected for a review called a Security Advisory Opinion. These cases are referred to a number of U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies and require a positive clearance to continue resettlement. This check is performed simultaneously with the CLASS review.

*Step 6:* Refugees are fingerprinted and photographed by a U.S. government employee, usually on the same day of their DHS interview. This data is checked against U.S. government databases.

*Step 7:* All refugee applicants are interviewed by DHS's U.S.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). An officer from USCIS travels to the refugee's country of asylum for a face-to-face interview. The information gleaned from the interview is passed to a DHS officer who will further confirm if the applicant qualifies as a refugee and is admissible under U.S. law.

*Step 8:* If the USCIS officer determines that the applicant meets all U.S. resettlement criteria, the officer conditionally approves the application and submits it to the U.S. Department of State for final processing. Once the security checks from steps 4, 5, and 6 have cleared, the conditional appeal becomes final.

*Step 9:* Approved resettlement applicants undergo medical screening conducted by the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy.

*Step 10:* Refugees are assigned to Voluntary Agencies in the U.S. who will place refugees with the local resettlement agencies that will assist refugees when they arrive. In Rochester, the Voluntary Agency is the Conference of Catholic Bishops and the resettlement agency is Catholic Family Center.

*Step 11:* While waiting for final processing, refugees are offered cultural orientation in preparation for initial resettlement.

*Step 12:* In order to depart for the U.S., refugees must pass a final interagency clearance check for any new information.

*Step 13:* Refugees given clearance for admission to the U.S. arrive at one of five airports and Customs and Border Protection offices review all documentation. Final checks ensure that the refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the U.S.

## **Focusing on Rochester**

Initial research focused on finding an active partner interested in deploying a fully-realized intervention. Two organizations were contacted: Brian Tomaszewski's RIT geomapping lab and Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services. Mike Coniff, in our initial interview, mentioned a specific need for a designed social connection intervention for refugees. The partnership, both for proximity and natural coordination of purpose, went forward. Mike explained that, while he had volunteers eager to become sponsors, he had no formal system for attracting, training, and managing them. Seeing an avenue for intervention, Mike and the author agreed to focus on the sponsor community. Through a series of interviews with both Mike and other local non-profit leaders, a picture of Rochester's refugee infrastructure emerged. The author also engaged in group tutoring of ESL students and individual academic tutoring of refugees to better understand the lived experience of both the refugees and their sponsors.

## **The Rochester refugee system**

Once refugees arrive at the designated entry airport, the Rochester refugee support system goes into action. The local resettlement agency, Catholic Family Center (CFC), sends caseworkers to the airport to pick up the arriving refugees. In advance of this day, CFC sets up a framework of caseworkers, secures lodging, and gathers supplies. Furniture is provided by one of a number of organizations in Rochester, including Mary's Place, Saint's Place, Rochester Refugee Resettlement, and various religious congregations. Food is provided by Catholic Family Center or Foodlink. Over the next few weeks, CFC caseworkers begin to help the refugees to learn English, prepare to work, integrate into U.S. society, gain access to healthcare, and learn to

navigate Rochester. Refugee children are enrolled in school and after-school programs. This support continues over the course of three months, after which CFC closes the refugee's case.<sup>49</sup>

### **A multi-agency period with no single advocate**

After the three-month resettlement period, refugees enter a multi-agency, self-advocacy period which they must navigate themselves. While many agencies exist to help families and individuals in this situation, there is no single advocate assigned to coherently guide refugees through this time. Both sponsors and non-profit representatives identified this as a particularly dangerous and critical time for refugees. Sponsors detailed stories of scams, misread bills, missed appointments with DSS, and complicated healthcare systems. Furthermore, they spoke of the difficulty posed by the lack of transportation, translation, and job support services. The critical function of sponsors is to fill in this gap.

### **Sponsorship in Rochester**

Currently, sponsoring exists in Rochester as an informal program led by Mike Coniff (director) and others at Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services (RRRS). RRRS is a non-profit organization in Rochester focused on providing low-cost, quality housing to refugees in Rochester. RRRS provides housing for refugees in primary resettlement—when they first arrive in the U.S.—and secondary resettlement—any migration thereafter. They initiated an informal program of sponsoring in January of 2016 when approached by a resident of Naples, NY, who had heard about RRRS through a Facebook “argument” concerning Muslim refugees in the U.S.<sup>50</sup> Over the year since this engagement, not only has the Naples sponsorship group grown,

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<sup>49</sup> Author's interview with Lisa Hoyt, Director of Refugee, Immigration & Employment Services Department at CFC

<sup>50</sup> Author's interview with Christine Livingston

but also others have formed. In 2000, during the influx of Congolese and Somali refugees, formal sponsorship provided by Catholic Family Services was the norm. At this point, too, the period of initial federal resettlement support was six months rather than three. Catholic Family Services expected sponsor families to engage with refugee families for six months, to say goodbye, and to move on to another incoming family. They did not count on human connections and sponsors' unwillingness to let go of deep bonds. Mike Coniff said, of these relationships, "The difference between having a sponsor or not is the difference between the children going to college or living in poverty".

### **What a sponsor does**

In short, a sponsor is similar to a caseworker or social worker. However, they are also a private citizen—and often a friend. Sponsors are usually deeply engaged in the lives of their sponsoree family. Duties noted in interviews with sponsors have included:

- Transportation
  - work
  - school
  - doctors' appointments
  - zoos and museums
  - DSS
  - job interviews
  - swimming lessons
  - parks
  - Rochester destinations
- Paperwork
  - DSS
  - citizenship
  - refugee status
  - reading mail
  - interpreting bills
  - school enrollment
  - state testing
  - advocacy in school settings

- Teaching
  - English
  - American culture
  - caring for Western-style homes
  - cooking using Western-style appliances
  - cleaning using Western-style appliances
  - American etiquette
  - healthy eating
- Healthcare
  - interpreting healthcare paperwork
  - advocacy
  - teaching Western healthcare norms
  - resolving extensive insurance issues
  - disability paperwork
  - finding specialists

Sponsors typically operate in groups with one individual serving as the “point-person”. This person is usually responsible for scheduling, record-keeping, and the majority of contact with the sponsored family. Sponsors are guides, helping to orient sponsored families to an unfamiliar culture and language.

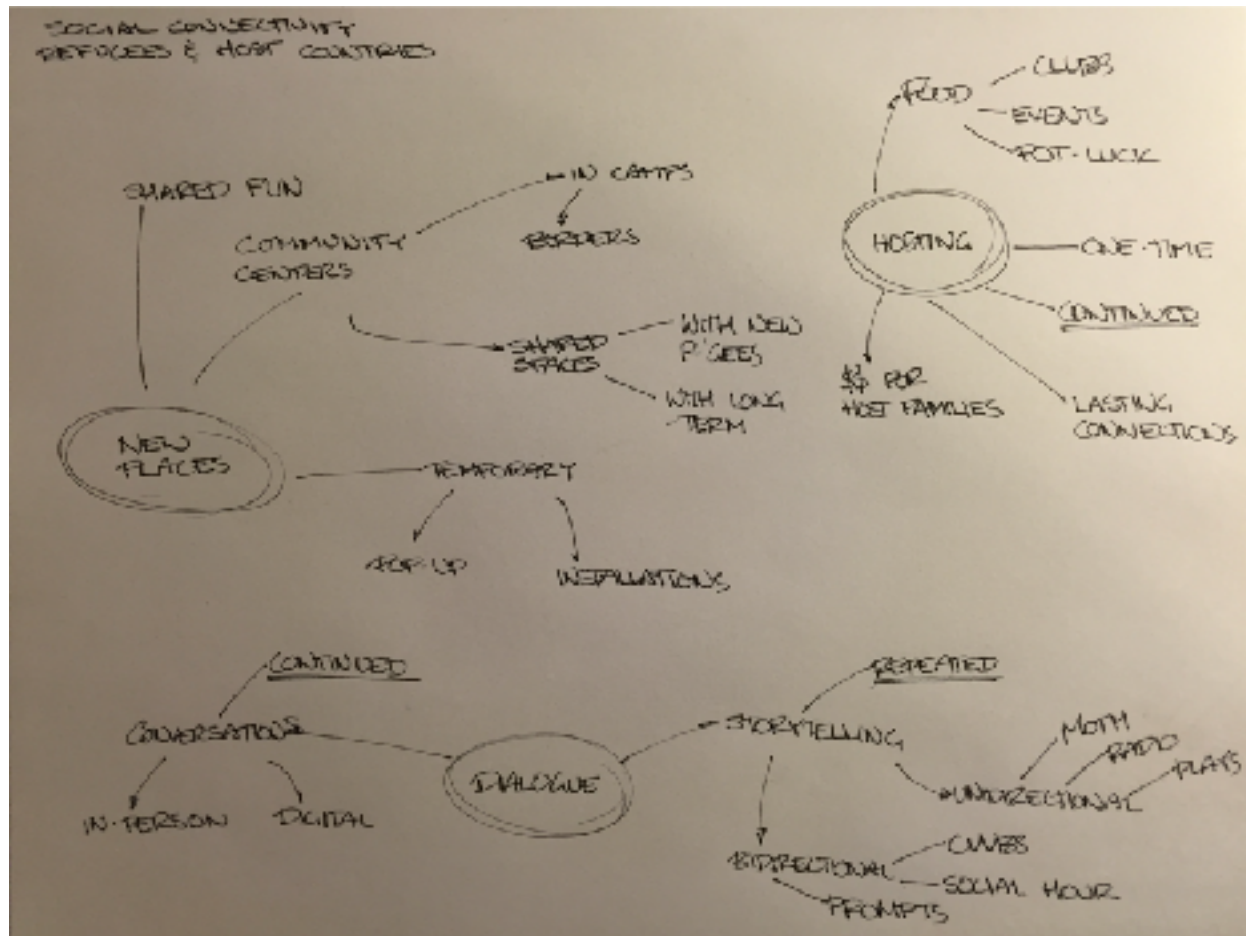
### **What are sponsors missing**

What emerged from the interviews, however, was an alarming amount of unassuredness and confusion from sponsors on a number of practical and personal questions. A question that came up spontaneously during the first interview became an integral part of every subsequent interview: “Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything that you don’t know and are wrestling with?” In general, the answers fell into two categories: practical questions about finding goods or services and personal questions about the ethics or philosophy of helping people in need. It was clear at this point that the designed intervention would involve some degree of education. Ideation at this time was focused on categorizing the educational needs of sponsors and understanding what practical outcomes could be achieved within the constraints of fulfilling



the graduate thesis requirements in Industrial Design at RIT. From this ideation emerged a three-step problem statement: how can we attract, train, and support sponsors of refugees in Rochester?

### Initial ideation



Ideation was focused on services and system-oriented solutions rather than product-based solutions. Specifically, options for location-based services, hosting, and increasing dialogue will be explored. Location-based services would include temporary and permanent installations, the use of new and old community centers, and increased interaction in and around refugee camps. Bringing together refugees and their host country's population in person may serve to spark

connection and friendship by prompting interactions that otherwise would not have occurred. Hosting services might include shared meals, clubs, continued boarding, and support for host families. Long-form interaction around social and ritual behaviors have a strong effect on peer bonding. Ideas for increasing dialogue include events for digital and in-person conversation, services oriented towards continued conversation, promoting storytelling, and recording storytelling. Feeling heard and feeling understood are important aspects of perceived social support. Broadly, opportunities for genuine and continued social interaction seemed to be the most likely to increase social connectivity. This ideation was overridden by the results of initial interviews which led to a strong focus on the sponsor program.

### **Prototype Development**

The intent of this project is to attract, train, and support sponsors of refugees in Rochester. Prototype development was focused on creating content and the collateral necessary to discuss the delivery of said content.

The author created a nine-stage curriculum based off of the answers to the aforementioned question. The curriculum was reviewed and approved by Mike Coniff. The sections are:

*ESL:* The services that are available in Rochester for teaching and translating English. How to approach cross-cultural communication with limited language skills.

*Food:* The services and organization that provide food directly or help with access to local, state, and federal food assistance.

*Healthcare:* What organizations in Rochester provide healthcare services, insurance, and help. How to deal with cultural differences in healthcare practices and expectations.

*DSS:* A brief explanation of how DSS works, what it provides, and how to navigate the system.

*Transportation:* How to navigate and explain the bus system, what might be appropriate in finding and delegating rides with other sponsors.

*Education:* The schools and after-school programs available to refugee children in Rochester.

*Jobs & Training:* The services and organizations that provide job assistance in Rochester; what expectations to have in terms of refugees' preparedness and issues.

*Nonprofits:* A broad overview of the nonprofits that provide assistance in Rochester.

*Fun:* What to do that is fun for the whole family and generally free or subsidized.

In preparation of prototype evaluation, it was determined that the ESL content would serve as a good starting point for focus group testing. *Figure 1* below is the prototype ESL content created for focus group evaluation:

*Figure 1.*

## **ESL & COMMUNICATION**

### **Brief**

Writing and speaking English are the most important skills for refugees to acquire. Refugees who come to the US will have varying exposure to English based on their education, cultural background, age, and journey here. While there are resources in Rochester that provide ESL/ELL services, it will be critical for you to engage in teaching as well.

### **Goals**

I am aware of what ESL resources are available in Rochester, who is eligible for them, and how to access them.

I feel comfortable communicating even through limited English.

I feel can evaluate my sponsoree's English abilities.

I can find or create meaningful language learning activities to teach English.

I can track and evaluate my sponsoree's progress.

### **Resources**

Classes:

**Saint's Place**

Monday and Thursday 1-on-1 tutoring  
[gdola45@rochester.rr.com](mailto:gdola45@rochester.rr.com)

**Mary's Place**

Group classes  
<http://www.marysplaceoutreach.org>

**Mercy Bridges**

1-on-1 tutoring  
<http://www.mercybridges.org/>

**ESOL Associates of Rochester**

Sully Library and Maplewood Library  
<http://www.livingonweekends.com/ESL/freeclasses.html>

**Office of Adult and Career Education Services (OACES)**

Adult career training, GED training  
 Family Learning Center, 30 Hart St #218  
<http://www.oaces.net/>

**Translation and Education Services:**

Catholic Family Center  
<http://www.cfcrochester.org/pg/language-services>

NY State Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)  
<http://www.monroe.edu/SupportServices.cfm?subpage=192>

**Catholic Family Services**

Bi-lingual interpreters and translators  
[ls@cfrochester.org](mailto:ls@cfrochester.org)  
<https://www.cfcrochester.org/for-professionals/refugee-services/language-services/>

**Online Language Resources**

[iteslj.org](http://iteslj.org)

[colorincolorado.org](http://colorincolorado.org)

[newsela.org](http://newsela.org)

**Principles**

Learners need comprehensible input. Learners need things they can understand. This may often include objects in the room, acting, speaking slowly, pictures, flash cards, etc.

Learners need to produce output and get feedback. Use the words and phrases they can understand to test their knowledge, allow them to experiment with the new language. Feedback can be given through body language or known language.

Learners need meaningful interaction. It is best to frame language learning activities around objects, places, and activities that are meaningful to the learner, i.e.:

**Tips**

Speak slowly.

A picture is worth a thousand words.

Create activities with nonverbal responses

Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Be conscious of how emotion affects readiness to learn: sometimes plans need to be delayed.

### **Starting Places**

Letters: name versus sound

I like \_\_\_\_\_.

I have \_\_\_\_\_.

Where is \_\_\_\_\_?

Adjectives: big/small, good/bad, easy/hard

How many \_\_\_\_\_?

Can you \_\_\_\_\_? I can \_\_\_\_\_.

Prepositions: in front of, behind, on, under, next to

### **Sample Activities**

Sorting words or pictures

Pictionary

Charades

Role-playing

Reading aloud picture books

Name an object in the room and have the student find it

Walk the student through describing the picture

Yes/no response statements

I see/I spy

Reading NewsELA articles together

Working on homework

Reading useful texts: grocery store flies, bus schedules, coupons, ESL class announcements

Talking about real life: Family, home, hobbies, likes/dislikes, favorite recipes, experiences

### **Tracking progress**

Shared Google docs

Excel spreadsheets

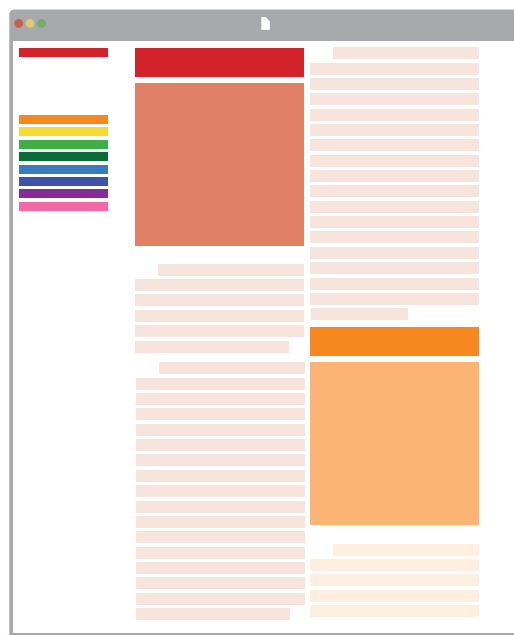
Notebooks

Homework and grades

Flash cards

Ideation was also conducted around potential delivery systems for this information. Figures 3-6 show the four concepts developed for delivering the curriculum as well as the potential advantages and disadvantages of each option. *Figure 7* shows the criterium along which these prototypes were evaluated.

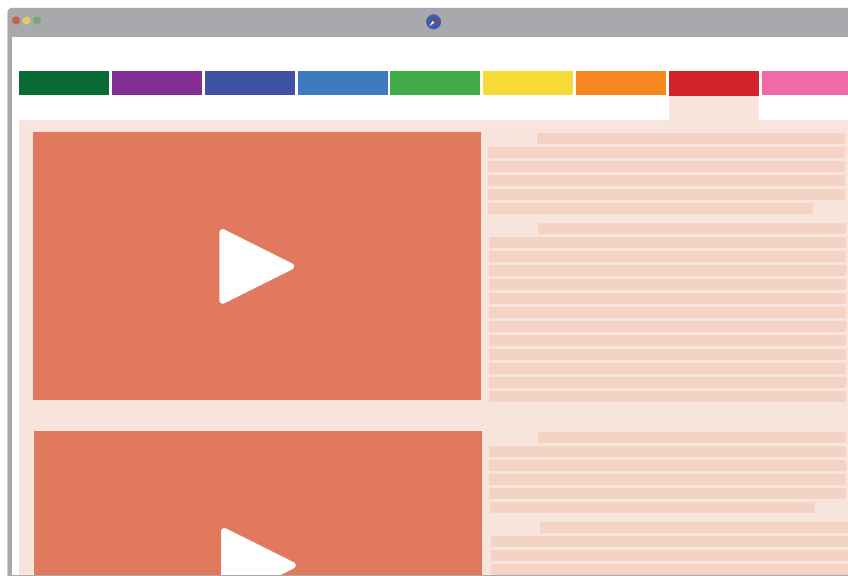
*Figure 3.*



**PDF**

Interactive  
 Illustrated  
 Profiles of sponsors  
 Profiles of refugees  
 Sections for units  
 Examples of organizational tools  
 Links to websites and resources  
 Could be paired with printable package  
 Could be shared with prospectives

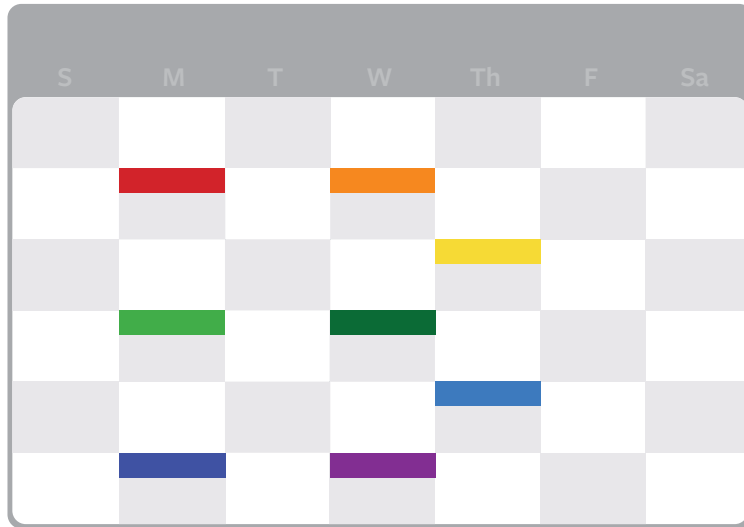
Needs to be updated manually  
 No version control  
 Easy to distribute

*Figure 4.***WEBSITE & VIDEOS**

Interactive  
Pages for units  
Profiles of sponsors  
Profiles of refugees  
Downloadable organizational tools  
Intergration with web services  
Links to websites and resources  
Could be paired with printable package  
Could have introductory videos  
Log-in section  
Wiki functionality

Needs to be updated manually  
Version control  
Specialized maintenance  
Easy to distribute  
Consistent video production

Figure 5.



**WORKSHOPS & CLASSES**

- Direct interaction
- Weekly or biweekly units
- Should be paired with website
- Creates community
- Sponsors could teach and share
- Meet refugees
- Share meals and activities
- Similar to AIA CEU, college CEd
  
- Teacher training and recruiting
- Curriculum work distributed
- Needs champions
- Needs to be advertised
- Needs space

Figure 6.

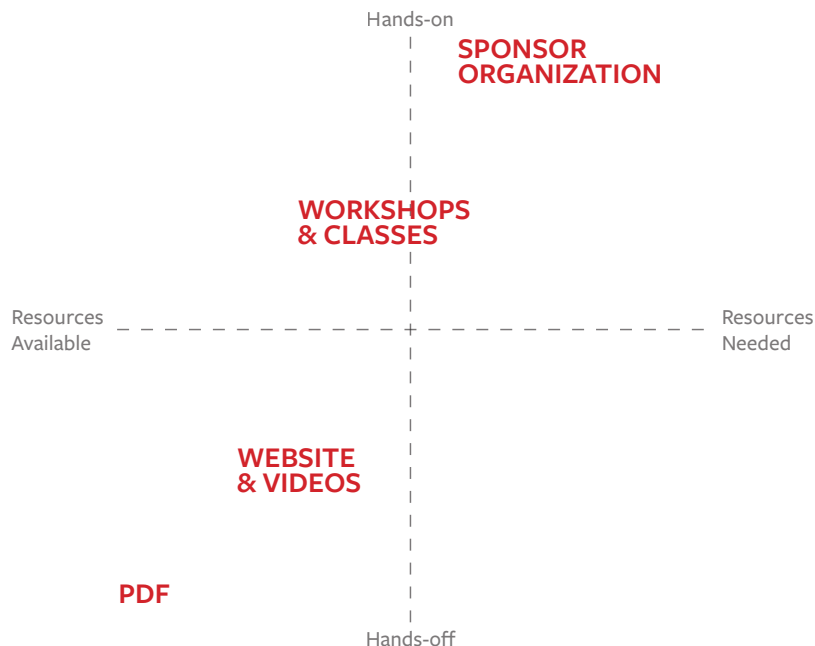


**SPONSOR ORGANIZATION**

- Focused on sponsor program
- Provides web materials
- Provides printed materials
- Provides courses
- Connects sponsors with organizations
- Pairs sponsors with refugees
- Maintains curriculum
- Advocates for sponsoring programs
- Direct problem-solving
- Facilitate interfaith work
- Facilitate non-profit collaboration
  
- Needs space
- Needs a full-time position
- Fundraising
- Grant-writing



Figure 7.



### Focus Group Testing

Focus group testing was used to evaluate the prototype and prompt spontaneous discussion amongst participants. Two goals drove the design of the focus group research guide: 1. evaluating the content of individual curriculum sections and 2. evaluating the potential delivery systems for the curriculum. Twenty participants were recruited, of which twelve were current sponsors and eight were prospective sponsors. This mix was recruited to understand what might attract new sponsors, what interests them, and how they interact with experienced sponsors. The experienced sponsors were recruited from different social and volunteer groups in order to prompt discussion about shared questions and new resources.

Figure 8 shows the research guide for the focus groups:

*Figure 8.*


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Fundamental drivers: WHY did people do this, how can we can more

Pain points: What weren't you prepared for

Knowledge Gap: What isn't available

Leverage: Things we can use to help new people

Community: How would people like to meet and organize

### **Opening**

Hello

Purpose

Design objectives for output of information

Conversation about sponsorship to gather your opinions, feelings, etc

The session should only last about 90 min

Any questions?

Introductions: name, background

Make nametags

### **Question 1**

Why are you here today?

What got you interested?

How did you hear about sponsorship in Rochester?

### **Question 2**

What do you/ did you expect sponsorship to mean?

Do you think sponsorship is a good name?

What do you associate with sponsorship?

### **Question 3**

What do you now know about sponsorship?

What do you wish you had known?

What do you want to know going in?

Exercise: Sponsor vs. Mentor vs. Guide

Other names for what we do?

### **Question 4**

What does your ideal sponsorship situation look like?

Why are you here?

What do you want to do?

**Question 5**

Exercise: ESL packet

Take time to read this.

Open discussion: What do you think of the brief? Goals?

**Question 6**

ESL packet exercise

Where would you expect to find this information?

How would you like to digest this information?

Pamphlet—Website—Class

Is it too much? What do you think is essential?

Is there anything that's missing?

I'll be sending out a larger packet for feedback: what is the most convenient way to do this?

**Question 7**

Would you be willing to contribute information, like wikipedia?

Would you like to have a website? A forum? A weekly meeting?

Exercise: Brainstorm

**Question 8**

How do you feel when you're told that refugees are in danger without sponsorship?

How do you feel when you're told that sponsorship is the difference between going to college or not?

What do you feel are the most effective ways of recruiting people or changing minds?

**Question 9**

Here are the other eight sections:

What questions do you have?

What do you think about when you consider refugees and this topic?

Write: Food, DSS, Healthcare, Transportation, Education, Jobs & Training, Nonprofits, Fun

**Exit Question**

Is there anything that we've missed?

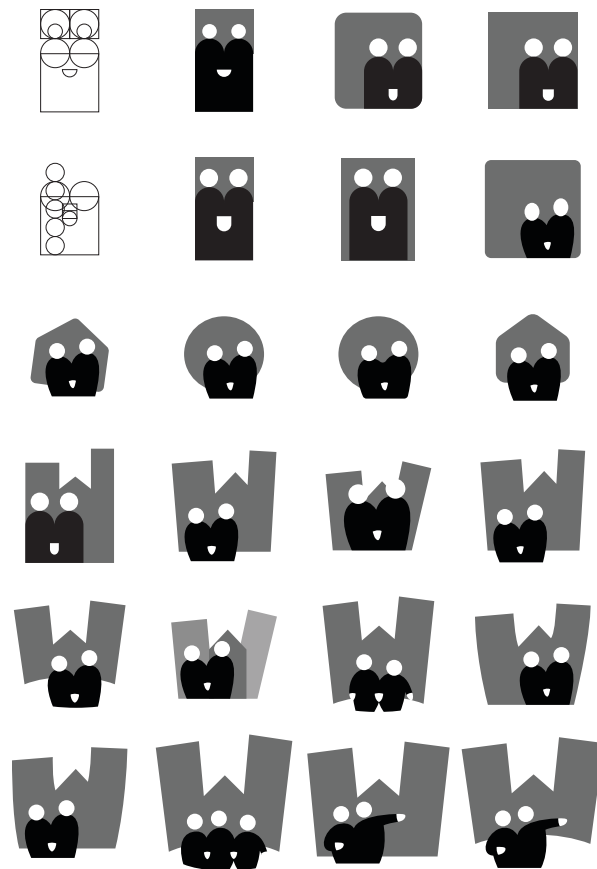
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## **Design Direction**

Focus group feedback was distilled into the following design criterium using a selection-sort-distill strategy on the transcriptions of each focus group. First, content should be simple, actionable, and hyperlinked. Sponsors did not respond positively to the in-depth, theory-based advice in the prototype ESL section. Rather, they preferred wikipedia-style hyperlinked lists that would allow them quick and easy access to each category. Sponsors and prospective sponsors alike responded most positively to the idea of a website with added video content. The video content, they expressed, should be emotional, individual, and short. Rather than using videos to host educational content, the videos would instead tell the emotional story of refugees and their sponsors to prospective sponsors. They should serve as the primary tool for attracting new sponsors. The website, finally, should be easy-to-use, “hand-off-able”, and professional. Users expressed their dissatisfaction with the majority of the websites used for non-profit work in Rochester, calling them “outdated”, “confusing”, and “ugly”. Clear branding and simple layouts were identified as key components in the website design.

## **Branding Ideation**

Branding ideation focused on the idea of showing two people together as equals. Eventually, one of the figures became a leader. A dynamic yet friendly background was added, reminiscent of both the Rochester Skyline and the letter W. *Figure 9* below shows initial logotype ideation and refinement.

*Figure 9.*

### **Content Creation**

Three subjects responded to the call to create interview videos for the website: sponsors Nancy and Melissa and refugee Djifa Kothor. Videos were filmed in partnership with students from the RIT School of Film and Animation and the Photography Department in the Schools of Design. One hour of video interview was recorded for each subject, focusing on drawing out their particular story and emotional connection to the sponsoring system. These were then edited

down into three-minute video profiles spliced with images symbolic of Rochester as a whole.

*Figures 10-11* show the video stills used to advertise the video profiles on the website.

*Figure 10.*



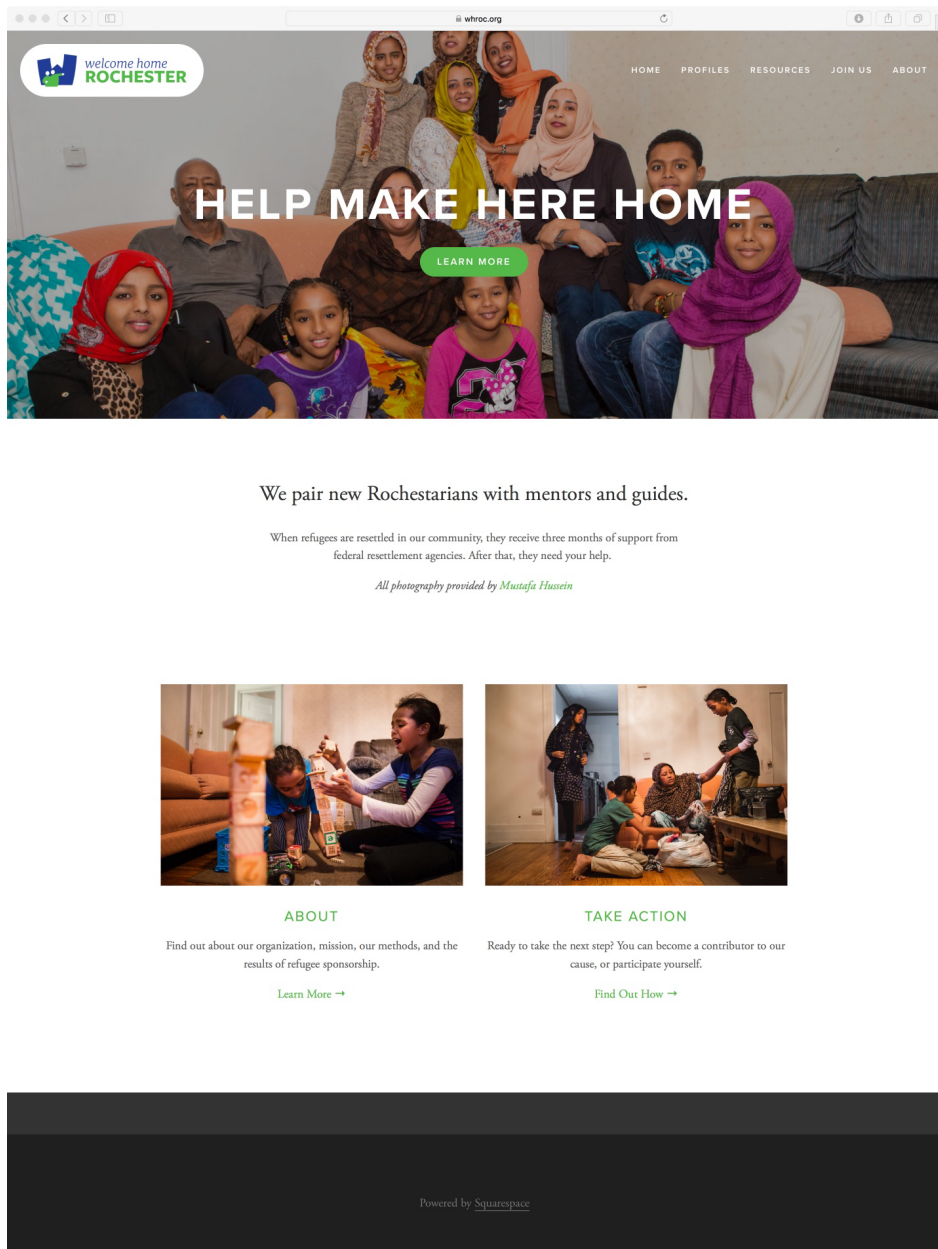
*Figure 11.*



### **Final Design**

Squarespace was used to create a simple website with three main sections: Profiles, Resources, About. The website also includes a Join Us form by which prospective sponsors can submit their information. Squarespace was chosen for its flexibility as well as “hand-off-ability”. There are ample resources for navigating its simple, easy-to-use interface. *Figure 12* shows the splash page for the website with photos provided by Mustafa Hussain, RIT Photography undergraduate.

Figure 12.





Branding was refined to be warm, organic, and welcoming. *Figure 13* shows the final logotype design.

*Figure 13.*



The content sections were, in accordance with design directives gleaned from the focus group, simple and direct collections of resources in the area. Each curriculum section was given its own resource page. The resource links included a brief description of relevant information. *Figure 14* shows the final design of the ESL curriculum section.

Figure 14.

The screenshot shows the website for Welcome Home Rochester (WRHRC). The browser address bar displays 'www.wrhrc.org'. The navigation menu includes 'HOME', 'PROFILES', 'RESOURCES', 'JOIN US', and 'ABOUT'. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Resources**
  - LANGUAGE
  - SOCIAL SERVICES
  - EDUCATION
  - FOOD
  - HEALTHCARE
  - TRANSPORTATION
  - JOB & TRAINING
  - FUN & FREE
- INTERPRETER SERVICES**
  - Catholic Family Center Interpreting Services** provides interpretation in over thirty different languages. Services are free for CFC clients and available to community providers working with non-English speaking clients at reasonable rates. 585-546-7220 x7139
  - NY State Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)** provides language services, support, and interpretation in schools.
- ESOL CLASSES & TUTORING**
  - Refugees Helping Refugees**  
RHR offers ESOL Classes for refugees and international students. Certified teachers hold classes from 9-12 every morning at OACES. All abilities and language levels are welcome. Though many students are mandated to attend RHR classes at OACES in order to receive their government benefits, RHR welcomes and accepts any person interested in learning English.  
Students can also sign up for a tutor in the afternoons for extra one-on-one help to refine and practice specific English reading, writing, and conversational skills. RHR is always looking for volunteer tutors for these afternoon sessions and as classroom aids in the morning classes.
  - Sain't's Place**  
1-on-1 tutoring on Mondays and Thursdays. All ages are welcome. Tutors are trained volunteers.  
[gdala45@rochester.ny.gov](mailto:gdala45@rochester.ny.gov)
  - Mary's Place**  
Group classes for all levels at Mary's Place (414 Lexington Avenue). 585-270-8626
  - Mercy Bridges**  
1-on-1 tutoring at the [Maplewood Library](#)  
585-288-2710
  - ESOL Associates of Rochester**  
Provides three free classes every week. Participants are welcome to join more than one and can start at any time during the year.  
Tuesday: 5-7pm at the [Sully Library](#)  
Thursday: 5-6:45pm at the [Maplewood Library](#)  
Saturday: 10am-12pm at the [Maplewood Library](#)
  - Office of Adult and Career Education Services (OACES)**  
Adult career training, GED training, and childhood education with a strong ESL component.  
[Link to upcoming intake dates.](#)
- ONLINE RESOURCES**
  - The [Internet Teachers of English](#) and a [Second Language Journal](#) provides detailed information on ESOL teaching and links to ESOL resources.
  - [Calorin Colorado](#) is a clearing house for activities, videos, and resources for teaching ESOL and providing practice opportunities.
  - [News ELA](#) provides current-events reading material for English learners of all levels. Articles can be sorted easily by topic and language ability. Great for easy English practice and keeping up with world news.

At the bottom of the page, it says "Powered by Squarespace".

## **Conclusion**

The refugee crisis and our reaction to it are perhaps the most important problem of the 21st century. Millions of people are displaced, with limited resources, looking to make a new life in a foreign country. More than material needs, these people also need social support. By increasing social connectivity between refugees and their host country's population, we may be able to intervene in the destructive cycles of social and political isolation that now affect so many vulnerable people. In this paper, the author has argued that increased social connectivity may increase perceived social support and in turn improve mental and physical health outcomes for refugees. Furthermore, the author developed an organization to address this need by attracting, training, and supporting volunteer sponsors of refugees in Rochester. The website is currently being maintained by the author. The organization, Welcome Home Rochester, is working in partnership with Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services to fill this need.

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