

# RURAL REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

Using Social Capital and Collaboration to Facilitate Rural Refugee Resettlement

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### Abstract

There has been much scholarship on refugee resettlement (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010; Nykiel-Herbert 2010; Frith 2003; Strang & Ager, 2010). Much of this research has focused on urban refugee resettlement. However, refugees in the United States are not contained to urban areas; some refugees undergo a secondary migration to rural communities. Research on rural refugee resettlement is an understudied part of refugee studies. This study seeks to understand how one small rural community has integrated refugees into their community and helped meet their needs. This study will also discuss how the social services within the community collaborated and built social capital to help meet refugees needs despite limited resources. Specifically, this study found that the communities' success is due to two main reasons. First, there is strong leadership throughout all sectors of the community, such as the school district, the police force, and several non-profits. Also, the community has a Keystone Coordinator, who acts as a central hub in the community. She facilitates social capital and collaboration among social services within the community and with services outside the community. Second, the community uses its small size advantageously and does not duplicate services so resources are used efficiently.

*Keywords:* refugee resettlement, rural, social capital, collaboration

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Since 1975, the United States has admitted 2.6 million refugees into the United States (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010, p. 8). There has been much research done on studying the various factors that affect how refugees integrate into their new surroundings (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010; Nykiel-Herbert 2010; Frith 2003; Strang & Ager, 2010). Some common factors of integration are belonging, trust, reciprocity, economic opportunity, and language acquisition. This study also seeks to study refugee integration, but from a non-traditional lens. First, this study only focuses on refugee integration in a rural setting, rather than large urban centers (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). When refugees initially enter the United States they are resettled by a resettlement organization that generally places them in an urban setting. However, if refugees move from their original resettlement location this move is referred to as secondary migration. Secondary migration, especially to rural communities, has been a less studied part of refugee resettlement. Delay (2009) commented, “there is a lack of understanding of integration processes in general and social integration and cohesion in particular.” In addition to studying rural refugee resettlement, this paper focuses on how the receiving community, or the community in which the refugees are resettling, has helped the refugees integrate using collaboration and social capital. Currently there is “insufficient research examining social network formation between new refugees, migrant groups and established communities” (Delay, 2009, p.2). This paper seeks to study how those social networks are formed and how these networks facilitate integration. Collaboration, social capital, and refugee integration have all been studied independently, but this study seeks to combine these three issues and study how they work together to integrate refugees in a rural setting. Prior research has shown that “collaboration with nonprofit nongovernmental groups should be particularly embraced in rural

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counties where such creative efficiencies would be inspired by their often desperate fiscal situations” (Edwards, Torgerson & Sattem, 2009, p.338). Other research has also established the idea that “social capital formation must be a central strategy for development planners” (Wilson, 1997). Since research has established that these two areas are critical to solving social issues, this paper will study how one rural community experiencing a refugee influx utilized collaboration and social capital to facilitate refugee integration. The purpose of this case study is to provide other rural communities an insight into how one community has successfully integrated their refugees.

### **Background**

This study seeks to expand our knowledge of refugee integration in the rural setting. While this study will use previously established factors for refugee integration, it will use these factors in a new way by focusing on how a rural community has utilized these factors. It will also incorporate the ideas of social capital and collaboration, and how rural communities can use these concepts to their advantage. The following section discusses and explains the previous research on refugees, refugee integration, and the challenges of addressing social issues in rural settings. It further elaborates on collaboration, social capital, and the benefits of collaboration and social capital. It is important to establish and explain each of these factors because they all play an important role in explaining how the case study community has been successful at facilitating rural refugee integration.

### **Refugees: Definition and Challenges**

According to the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement, a refugee, as defined under Title IV of the Immigration and Nationality Act, is:

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A person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (Gilbert, Hein & Losb, 2010, p. 8).

Refugees are a special type of immigrant within the United States; they are immigrants who cannot go back to their former countries because if they do, they will more than likely face death, persecution, or imprisonment. Many of the refugees resettled in the U.S are placed by the U.S. government in urban communities in Minnesota, Washington, Massachusetts, Ohio, Arizona, California, Texas, and Colorado.

Refugees are also the most heavily screened immigrants in the United States<sup>1</sup>. Before they are allowed admittance, their home country records are checked, along with Central Intelligence Agency records and Interpol records. If their records are acceptable, they are given a health screening to check for infectious diseases. If refugees pass all the screenings, they are allowed entry into the United States, and are picked up at the airport by a refugee resettlement organization (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). Refugee resettlement programs are primarily non-profit organizations funded by the federal government, but they can also be government agencies. There are thousands of refugee organizations that voluntarily help, and there is also the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010).

Once in the United States, refugees are given eight months of public assistance (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). After eight months, refugee families can apply for Temporary Assistance

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<sup>1</sup> Due to IRB policies and confidentiality, source cannot be revealed

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for Needy Families (Refugee resettlement organization sub-office director, personal communication, 2011). After eight months have expired, refugees still qualify for non-monetary resettlement services, such as employment assistance, for the next five years. At the end of five years, they are no longer classified as a refugee (Director Adult Basic Education, personal communication, 2011). Most involved in refugee resettlement agree that sources for refugee assistance, both public and private, are “unable to fully support refugee resettlement” (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010, p. 19).

Refugees face many challenges when they resettle. The most obvious challenge is the language barrier. They also have to learn to adjust to a different culture; and many of them have lost support from their extended family and stable social structure during the transition. Within a family, there is often discord between children (who are assimilating more rapidly) and their parents, and between husbands and wives, if the wife needs to work. Refugees also face a more limited employment outlook, and trained and educated professionals often cannot get jobs in their fields. Refugees are also unfamiliar with many institutions in the U.S., such as the educational systems, social services, and their legal rights (Roxas, 2008). Finally, many refugees experience anxiety over a possible hostile reception in the U.S. (Roxas, 2008).

### **Factors for Refugee Integration**

Refugee integration, as defined by the Integration Work Group<sup>2</sup> (IWG), is a “dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and the receiving communities intentionally work together, based on a shared commitment to acceptance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010, p. 10). The IWG is a research group funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement to study the various factors necessary for a refugee to fully integrate and be successful in U.S. society. The IWG has found that, while there

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<sup>2</sup> The Integration Work Group study is listed in the references under Gilbert, Hein & Losb, 2010

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is no one specific way to integrate refugees, there are factors that are necessary for successful integration. These factors include: health and well-being, English language acquisition, economic opportunity, education, housing, social connections, belonging and safety, and civil values, participation and engagement (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010)

These integration factors are useful for communities who are experiencing an influx of refugees. Many of these factors are interrelated, and often progress in one area can impede progress in another area. The IWG study found this to be especially true in relation to language acquisition and economic opportunity, and this issue will be addressed in the findings section. The IWG noted that in order to measure integration factors, there must be strong collaboration within communities. The study also found that “there needs to be a community approach [to integration] involving government, schools, employers, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010, p. 21)

### **The Challenges of Addressing Social Issues in Rural Settings**

It used to be common belief that rural communities were insulated from what are believed to be “urban” social issues, but recent research has shown otherwise:

Even in small towns that have been high functioning, with plenty of social capital and volunteerism, local residents increasingly face unusual, if not wholly unprecedented, challenges. A combination of economic pressures, environmental regulations, technological advancement, and shifting political winds have led to well-documented changes in rural places...these changes include, but are not limited to...restructuring of existing industries leading to immigration of ethnically diverse populations.

(Edwards, M., Torgerson, M., & Sattem, 2009, p. 330)

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For this reason, it is of utmost importance that rural areas receive as much research as urban areas. Rural areas face many of the same social issues, such as refugee integration, but have not received an equal amount of research. Rural communities, in addition to facing challenges that urban communities face, also face separate challenges that are created by their rural location<sup>3</sup>. For example, transportation can pose a serious problem in rural communities. In addition, rural communities do not always have the same access to funding or specialized social services that are available in urban centers. When refugees initially enter the U.S., they are met by a refugee resettlement service and are put into a very controlled environment to help them adjust. However, if refugees move to a rural location, there is not the same controlled environment<sup>4</sup>. For example, in an urban controlled environment, there is more access to translators to help refugees navigate. However, the language barrier becomes even more difficult for refugees (and the receiving community) in a rural setting with fewer resources, and less experience in working with refugees.

### **Collaboration and Social Capital**

Social issues are often beyond the ability of any one community or sector to solve. For example, in an educational classroom setting, a refugee student is struggling not only with language, but probably is also struggling with post-traumatic stress syndrome and may be working to support his family (Roxas, 2008). The school alone cannot provide adequate counseling and family support service. Therefore, it is necessary that the school identify this need and link the student with the proper support services. For refugee integration, especially in the rural setting where refugee-specific services and organizations are sparse, it is important that

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<sup>3</sup> Due to IRB policies and confidentiality, source cannot be revealed

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a community works together to achieve integration. Social capital and collaboration are important factors for successful refugee integration in a rural setting.

Collaboration is defined as “to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Previous research has established that collaboration can be measured on a continuum (Tseng, Liu, & Wang, 2011). In the beginning stages of collaboration, there is a cooperative environment in which agencies talk and communicate. Full collaboration is defined as fully shared services among agencies. In this stage Tseng, Liu, and Wang note that an agency’s autonomy begins to be replaced by policy making within the collaborative environment. Tseng, Liu, and Wang (2011) also found several factors for successful collaboration, including a positive, collaborative climate, member commitment, an interagency coordinating council, communication, leadership, and personal connections.

Social capital has several definitions. Robert Putnam (2000), who is considered one of the pioneers of the idea of social capital, defines it as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that from arise from them” (p. 19). Wagner and Gimenez (2008) define social capital as “relationships of trust, norms of reciprocity, and networks among individuals that can be drawn upon for individual or collective benefit” (p. 324). Other social capital scholars, such as Rohe (2004), have defined social capital as a model: civic engagement begets new relationships, new relationships lead to greater trust, and trust leads to more effective collective action, as well as individual and social benefits. (Mandarano, 2009) In their study, Wangers and Gimenez found that understanding, empathy, and respect were all important for developing social capital.

### **Collaboration Builds Social Capital**

While collaboration and social capital are different, they are related because collaboration builds social capital. Prior research has established this fact (Pretty and Ward 2001; Ostrom 1997; Putnam 1993; Wagner & Gimenez, 2008). Tseng, Liu, and Wang (2011) found that important factors for collaboration included communication, personal connections, member commitment, and leadership. These factors are all important because they establish trust, understanding, and respect, which are the cornerstones of social capital (Wagner & Gimenez, 2008). Collaboration is important because it provides the opportunity for different organizations to come together, listen, and learn about each other. When groups listen and learn from one another, they build trust, understanding, and respect. Consequently social capital is formed. Wagner and Gimenez (2008) say, "Shared understanding, empathy, and respect for others' viewpoints develop over time as individuals in a group have the opportunity to share stories and hear others' perspectives. Understanding individuals' perspectives, in turn, is a prerequisite for respecting them" (p.340). By collaborating within different social service organizations, non-profits, and government entities, trust, communication, reciprocity, and networks are built, all which lead to increased social capital (Wagner & Gimenez, 2008).

### **Benefits of Collaboration and Social Capital for Rural Refugee Integration**

There are several benefits for a rural community to develop their social capital and collaboration. These benefits often help overcome some apparent disadvantages that rural communities with refugee influxes face, and consequently prove why social capital and collaboration are important. First, social capital and collaboration "may improve a group's ability to...manage risk, innovate, and adapt to change" (Wagner & Gimenez, 2008, p. 324). Refugees present a major change for social services in rural areas, which requires social services to

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innovate and adapt to their needs. Second, communities with strong social capital have a greater access to outside resources, expertise, and funding, due to their connections with organizations outside of their immediate community (Wagner & Gimenez, 2008, p. 324). This is critical for rural communities because many do not have a social service specifically focused on refugees. These outside connections not only provide extra funding sources, but they also provide extra people with whom communities can brainstorm and innovate. Third, if agencies collaborate, they will better understand the needs of the community and will be able to respond accordingly (Graci, 2010). Fourth, collaboration and social capital expand an organization's ability to be efficient and effective because they will not duplicate other organizations' services. This is especially important in an era of diminishing budgets (Tseng, Lui, Wang, 2011, p. 789). Sixth, there will be an increase in referrals among agencies, so refugees' are less likely to slip through the cracks and have their needs go unmet (Tseng, Lui, Wang, 2011).

### **Research Method: Case Study**

Fort Morgan is a rural community of 11,300 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It was chosen as a case study because it has been active at integrating refugees into the community and trying to make their transition to the U.S. as seamless as possible. Due to their proactive practices, Fort Morgan provides an example for other rural communities to follow. By examining Fort Morgan, we can see how the city has overcome challenges using collaboration and social capital. Case study methodology was chosen as a research method because it provides an opportunity to focus on a single community and the various ways the community has engaged in innovated solutions. Case studies also provide an opportunity to test theory and build upon previous research. This study does seek to build upon and expand on previous refugee integration research (University of Texas Austin, 1997). Case studies also provide an

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opportunity to explore a new topic, and the combination of social capital and collaboration for rural refugee integration is a new topic (University of Texas Austin, 1997). Only one community was evaluated, so time could be taken to explore and analyze many of these facets. Case studies also provide a good basis for application of findings in other situations (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010; University of Texas Austin, 1997). Sixteen interviews were done for this study, along with three classroom observations of middle school and high school ESL classes and the community college's adult basic education. Fort Morgan also holds community meetings, and an observation of a meeting was also conducted. This study also incorporates information from the local newspaper and other document sources. Due to IRB policies, the information from newspapers is not cited in text because it would breach confidentiality because it would provide identifiable information about the case study. Instead, when a fact came from a source which would identify the community, a footnote is used to notate that the information did come from a reputable source.

In 2006, the first few refugees began to trickle into to the community (Director of Adult Basic Education, personal communication, 2011). The first group that came consisted of about 50 men. Refugees have been drawn to Fort Morgan because of employment at the local meat packing plant, which is now has a workforce of 50% refugees. The meat packing plant has been instrumental in supporting refugees in Fort Morgan, and more will be said later about its contributions. By 2008, refugee families had begun to move into the area, and the school district began to see an influx of ESL students. Currently, there are about 1,000 refugees in Fort Morgan, although numbers are difficult to measure since refugee status is only given voluntary for census information. The majority of refugees emigrated from East Africa with about 90% from Somalia. However, there are also immigrants from over 23 countries in Fort Morgan, who speak

11 different languages (Director One Community, personal communication, 2011). Overall, Fort Morgan did not experience strong negative reactions towards the influx of refugees (Local Journalist, personal communication, 2011). However, there were a few outspoken dissenters, but they soon learned that intolerance would not be acceptable in Fort Morgan.

### **Findings**

A previous study has shown that an “availability of resources within [a] community impacted the degree new relationships formed and network structure” (Mandarano, 2009, p. 258). Social services play an important role in refugee integration; social services not only provide necessary help and assistance to refugees, but they also provide opportunities to build relationships and tie the refugees to the community. This section will discuss how Fort Morgan is meeting each of the Integration Work Groups’ (IWG) factors for integration using its social services, as well as discuss the challenges the social services are facing when trying to meet each integration factor. This section covers many of the social services in Fort Morgan, but is not a comprehensive list. Many of the programs offered at Fort Morgan are similar to other programs in large urban centers, showing that small towns can also facilitate refugee integration (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010).

#### **Integration Indicators: Language Acquisition and Education**

The IWG study found that the most important factor for integration was language acquisition. The IWG study also found that English as a Second Language classes (ESL) and employer-subsidized language classes were critical to successful refugee integration. There are two main opportunities for adult language classes in Fort Morgan: Adult Basic Education classes through the community college and Workforce Education. Refugees under the age of 21 received services through the Fort Morgan School District.

### **Fort Morgan School District.**

The Fort Morgan School District has been very proactive at accommodating refugee needs despite diminishing budgets. Schools face many challenges in dealing with new refugee populations. As more refugees are being relocated, funding for programming, such as ESL, has been cut (Roxas, 2008). This is especially true in rural communities that do not have the budget to hire additional help (Edwards, Torgerson, & Sattlem, 2009). Another issue is that the teaching force in the United States is still predominately white, middle class, female, monolingual, and unfamiliar with refugees and their culture (Roxas, 2008). Schools also do not often have the resources to provide training to teachers, even though teachers want training (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). The Fort Morgan School District is currently serving 150 refugee students from 17 different countries speaking 17 different languages (Director of Instructional Support Services, personal communication, 2011).

The school district has been very proactive at helping their refugee students learn English, as well as communicating with their parents and being a resource for them. The district has hired two multilingual professionals. One speaks Somali, Swahili, and English, and the other speaks Somali, Arabic, and English. Besides providing translation services, these professionals also do house visits if there are problems with students, and work with parents to connect them to the school district and its administration. They also have a part-time position, a community navigator, who helps integrate parents into the educational system. The school district is also going to implement a newcomer's program, which will be a welcome and intake center focused on helping students with their English before they enter a regular classroom. It will be a ½ day long program teaching language, social, and cultural skills. The other ½ of the day they will attend school. Students could be in the program from 2 weeks to one year. This has great

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potential for under accredited, over-aged students who might otherwise get frustrated in regular high school and drop out.

The school district faces many challenges in educating refugees. For example, some students have never even held a pencil before, so teachers have to start at the very beginning teaching the basics of language acquisition. Communication also poses a problem with new students who have no English background. Teachers also said that they lacked a familiarity with their students' cultures, and at times, this could pose challenges, due to the variety of languages and cultures in each classroom. In the middle school ESL level 2 class, there were 4 countries and 4 different languages among 8 students. In the high school ESL level 2 class, there were 6 Mexican students, 3 Eritrean students, 2 Kenyan students, 1 Somali student, and 1 Chinese student. ESL teachers also said that often they are not only teaching language, but also social and cultural skills.

The refugees themselves also faced challenges in the school district. Many of the older students have to work to help support their families, and some of them are raising their younger siblings. In the high school ESL classes, the teacher said that ten of her 50 students worked full time at the meat-packing plant, while attending class for 2 hours a day. One of these students was falling asleep in the back of the classroom, and when asked why he was tired by the teacher, he said that he had worked the night shift the previous evening, and then was up to 1 AM doing homework (teachers are very understanding if students cannot not complete their homework).

However, despite these challenges, the refugee students are making progress. In the beginning of last fall, the middle school ESL teachers received three students who had never held a pencil before, and who were reading easy children's books by the end of the year. All the teachers cited the refugee students as being some of the hardest working students they have had.

**Adult Basic Education.**

For refugees who are over the age of 21, the local community college's Adult Basic Education Program (ABE) provides one opportunity for refugees to receive an education. Originally, the program began to help the large Spanish-speaking population, as well as a few other non-native speakers that filtered through the area (Director of ABE, personal communication, 2011). However, since the explosion of refugees into the area, ABE now has students speaking 11 different languages (Director, ABE, personal communication, 2011). The program serves about 550 students, and about 100 of them are of African heritage, making them potential refugees, if they have been in the U.S. less than five years. The program offers ESL classes, a basic skills class, GED preparation classes and classes to transition students to college (Director ABE, personal communication, 2011). ESL classes are offered to accommodate the schedules of the shifts at the meat plant. ABE does not offer facilities for child care, which can be a barrier to some refugees who need it.

The director commented that "We have some [students] that come in and they don't have any language experience at all. So not only are we teaching them to speak the language, but were having to begin the whole process that you begin with children of understanding the sound and symbol" (personal communication, 2011). One challenge that ABE has found with its refugee students is that they often want to come in and pass the General Educational Development Test (GED), thinking that it will be quick to get this important certification. However, ABE makes most of its students start in ESL courses because they are not proficient enough at English. This often frustrates students, and the director commented that, "It's really a step by step process and they are in more of a hurry than the process allows. So part of the learning process is helping them understand what the different stages are, where they are in those stages,

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and what it is going to take to continue.” In an ESL level two class I observed, there were nine students, eight males and one female. There were six countries represented in the nine students, including Somalia, Sudan, Mexico, DRC, Eritrea, and Benin. The students demonstrated lots of self-motivation, and often looked up words in the dictionary and felt very comfortable asking questions. Overall, the class was very interactive with each other and the teacher, and most students had a fairly good grasp on conversational English.

### **Workforce Education.**

The other option for refugees to learn English is through the Workforce Education program. Workforce Education is housed at the meat packing plant that employs the refugees. The IWG study found that there is a complicated relationship between language acquisition and economic opportunity, both of which are important integration factors. Work was found to potentially slow language acquisition. If refugees do not learn English, but do hold a steady job, they will not integrate as well (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). However, by combining the opportunity to learn with the opportunity to work, as Workforce Education has, refugees have been able to integrate more smoothly. Workforce Education provides three levels of ESL classes, a citizenship class, and a learning center for employees. The meat packing plant contracts out the teaching staff from the local community college, and the plant is the primary funder of the program. The program also helps prepare students to attend more advanced classes at the community college. The program is focused on helping their students assimilate to the U.S. There are currently about 200 students, and there is also a waiting list. Many of the students on the waiting list also begin to take courses at the Adult Basic Education program. The director of Workforce Education said that their teaching philosophy is to “try to help the students with what is going on in their lives.” For example, last year many of the refugees were deceived into using a fraudulent tax preparer

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because they did not understand the tax system. The program worked hard to find them someone in the IRS who could help the refugees.

There are four teachers in the program, which began in 1993 with a federal workforce grant. After five years, the government cut the funding, and the meat packing plant took on the majority of the cost of running the program. The meat packing plant decided to fund the program for several reasons. First, the company wanted to be able to promote workers from within, but their workers lacked language skills, so they kept the classes so that their workers could learn English. Second, they wanted to reduce worker turn over, and they believed that offering these benefits would entice workers to stay. Research has shown that Workforce Education has reduced worker turnover. Finally, the plant "wanted to help the immigrants assimilate into the community so they won't be problems in the community... We want the immigrants to be good citizens and know how to deal with our culture." The program allows students to self-design what courses they want to take.

### **Integration Indicator: Economic Opportunity**

The IWG study found that along with English language acquisition, the economic opportunity in an area was a critical factor for integration. If an area could not provide jobs for refugees who speak little or no English, the refugees in the area would suffer. Finding stable employment is a critical factor for integration. Employment is critical for refugees to find because their funding support runs out after eight months. Therefore most refugees are eager to find a job (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010). The IWG study also found that a weakened economy affected refugees greatly, as it was harder to find steady employment.

The meatpacking plant in Fort Morgan provides refugees an excellent economic opportunity. The meat packing plant is especially appealing to refugees due to its relatively high

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pay (13.25 per hour plus benefits) and its education program<sup>5</sup>. The meat packing plant also provides insurance for its workers, and also has a union for its workers (Local Journalist, personal communication, 2011). The plant has also been accommodating to the refugees in other ways. For example, the plant has a program that lets high school age students work part time and attend high school, and have translators trained in Somali, English, and Spanish. The plant does not actively seek refugees as new employees, rather the refugees at the plant spread the word to other refugees. One of the workers of the regional refugee resettlement program said, “Most refugees, if they are working, they are pretty happy.” One of the Somali resettlement organization employees said, “they got a job, so the only challenge they face are language barrier, but go to ESL classes.” In many ways, by working at the plant, the refugees have alleviated a huge barrier (steady employment), and then can begin to work on their language skills at the ESL classes. The plant has been instrumental in helping refugees integrate, and its support for refugee integration in Fort Morgan is critical.

### **Integration Indicator: Health and Well-being**

The IWG study found that health and well-being of refugees is critical to integration. It specifically found that poverty greatly affects refugee’s health and well-being since many do not have access to proper preventative health care and good nutrition. Studies have also found that refugees often suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, making access to mental health services important (Roxas, 2008). Fort Morgan has a community healthcare center<sup>6</sup>, which is a non-profit medical organization dedicated to “improve[ing] access and reduc[ing] barriers to care including: ability to pay, transportation, and language. The center “serves all community members with the low-income, medically underserved population and migrant and seasonal

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<sup>5</sup> Due to IRB policies and confidentiality, source cannot be revealed

<sup>6</sup> Name has been changed

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farmworker population as the priority clientele.”<sup>7</sup> Refugees take advantage of the center’s facilities, especially since it has had a Somali speaking receptionist (Director of One Morgan County, personal communication, 2011). The Director of One Morgan County said the center has “worked hard to being responsive to the community needs.”

However, while the center has done an excellent job at accommodating the physical well-being of refugees, their mental well-being has remained “largely untapped” (Director of One Morgan County, personal communication, 2011). As previously mentioned, most refugees have experienced severe trauma in their lives, so mental health screenings and treatment are important services to provide. At one point, Fort Morgan was supposed to have an agency come to provide these services, but the agency never followed through, saying that the location was too far away. The school guidance counselor, already overwhelmed with work, said that she was unable to provide in-depth counseling, but that if serious issues did emerge in students, they were given help. Within the community there is also a state-funded mental health service provider, which offers therapy on a sliding pay scale. However, the agency is already at capacity with current clients, since there are less than ten therapists and only one psychiatrist for the whole county (High School Counselor, personal communication, 2011). All community members agreed that the next step in integrating refugees was getting mental health services to refugees.

### **Integration Indicator: Participation and Engagement, Social Connections**

The study also found that integration can be challenging because it is tempting to segregate refugees into separate communities, since it is easier to provide services and it can feel more comfortable and less overwhelming to refugees. However, the IWG study found that civic engagement has been repeatedly shown to be important so that refugees connect to their new community, as well as have opportunities to practice English. The refugees interviewed for the

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<sup>7</sup> Due to IRB policies and confidentiality, source cannot be revealed

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IWG study cited that they were adversely affected when there were isolated from American communities.

Fort Morgan's non-profit, One Morgan County, focus has been to facilitate communication between diverse populations and encourage integration in the community. One Morgan County was started because community members "saw a long standing disconnect between the established community members experience and the immigrant community experience in this area." One Morgan County began in 2005 as a result of a grant<sup>8</sup>.

One Morgan County's programs are designed to build bridges between populations. Some programs include workshops to connect immigrants and refugees with services, contact lists, and an International Music Fest. One Morgan County also holds community meetings. The last meeting was titled, "Building Cultural Knowledge: Understanding American Arabs and Muslims." About 50 people were in attendance. One Morgan County is also working on becoming accredited to provide help on immigration legal paperwork. The director is also pioneering a new program call the Wayfinder Endeavor, which is a program that links a refugee with a volunteer who will help the refugee learn to navigate basic institutions, such as banks or the post office. The refugee will also get to practice with English with her tutor. Past studies have found that making American friends was critical to integration, and could only make friends depending on language skills (Gilbert, Hein, & Losb, 2010).

These programs work on reaching out to the refugee community and the receiving community and facilitating their interaction. By providing opportunities for refugees to learn about the culture in which they now live, they are forming social connections that will help them

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<sup>8</sup> Originally, OneCommunity was founded to facilitated connections between the Hispanic community and the receiving community. Three years after it was established, refugees began to move to Jamesville.

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integrate. These programs provide an opportunity for refugees to get involved, and to not be isolated within their own community.

### **Integration Indicator: Housing**

Housing is an important indicator because it not only provides shelter, but it signals that the refugees have become less transient and has a steady job. However, if refugees are unable to find housing close to their work area, and there is no public transportation, then they will not be able to keep their job. The regional refugee resettlement organization said they rarely resettle refugees in Fort Morgan initially because of lack of housing. Another issue with the housing in Fort Morgan is that, even if a refugee family is able to secure jobs and an apartment, many do not have money for furniture or other necessary household items (Refugee Resettlement sub-office director, personal communication, 2011). Initially, refugees are provided with necessary household items when they settle in the U.S. by the resettlement organization. However, with secondary migration, families often cannot take these articles with them, especially if they are coming from far away.

### **Integration Indicator: Safety and Belonging**

The IWG study found that a common barrier to integration is refugee's mistrust of government entities, specifically police since many refugees had negative experiences with law enforcement in their native countries. For this reason, it is important that law enforcement help refugees feel safe in the community, as well being a resource for refugees when they need help. Historically, law enforcement has not played a major role in refugee integration, but in Fort Morgan's case, the police department has played a significant role. Fort Morgan's police department has demonstrated tolerance and fairness to all. Specifically, the police chief has fostered an environment where "one group's rights are not valued over others" (Director One

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Morgan County, personal communication, 2011). The lieutenant, who is also a member of the One Morgan County board, said, “We’re actively involved with them. We participate with them in a collaborative effort to educate them about law enforcement and the culture that goes around anytime of law enforcement.”

An important step the police department has taken to overcome refugees’ distrust of law enforcement is to form an adversity committee. This committee works with the refugee elders to establish trust and communication. The police department, in conjunction with One Morgan County, has also done a driver’s education course with translators, and hosted informational sessions with refugees about driving, which are well attended. The police’s biggest concern with refugees is their driving habits. The police also have translation booklets, and outreach programs, and programs to teach refugees their rights. The police force also works to protect the refugees and make them feel a part of the community by reassuring the receiving community that the refugees do not pose a threat to them, and by not allowing violence against the refugees to occur. Recently, there was a rumor that two Somali men tried to kidnap a child. After determining that the rumors were not valid, the police chief put down the rumor, cautioning, “malicious gossip...can be incredibly destructive causing the person being talked about emotional harm with hurt feelings or damaged reputation, or in this case unrest in a very diverse community.”

(Director of One Morgan County, personal communication, 2011).

### **Discussion**

Fort Morgan was able to integrate refugees due to their collaboration and social capital. However, this paper seeks to go beyond simply concluding that collaboration and social capital has been integral to Fort Morgan’s success. Rather, this study seeks to uncover *how* Fort Morgan has developed its collaboration and social capital. Due to the brevity of this paper, the

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discussion section will only focus on two reasons why Fort Morgan was successful: having collaborative leadership in all sectors, and using a small community size advantageously. These two reasons were chosen because they will be easier to replicate in other rural communities facing a refugee influx.

### **Collaborative Leadership in All Sectors**

For rural communities looking to increase their social capital and collaboration, strong leadership is necessary. Tseng, Liu, and Wang substantiated that leadership was important for successful collaboration (2011). However, this study found that leadership alone is not enough. Rather, there needs to be a focus on collaborative leadership style, and there must be strong leaders in all sectors of a community. If leaders from a variety of areas come together with the goal of collaborating, they can make substantial changes. Refugee integration is a multi-sector endeavor, and though a community may have strong leaders in one sector, without other leaders in other sectors to collaborate with, refugees' needs will go unmet as proper referrals are not made. Fort Morgan's success stems in part from the fact that their four main leaders come from different sectors.

The first leader is the director of the local non-profit One Morgan County. Whenever interviewees were asked who they collaborated with, the first or second answer was always "One Morgan County." Through her position, the director has built bridges and bonds among people in the community, and much more will be said about her role later in this discussion.

The second leader, the Fort Morgan Police Chief, has been instrumental at calming people's nerves and setting a precedent that all community members will be treated equally and without bias. He continues to give factual, non-biased information to the public.

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The third leader is a reporter for the local paper who writes about events and information regarding the refugees. He has used his position to promote tolerance and has kept an open, non-judgmental tone towards the refugees. His articles have been instrumental in mobilizing support from the community (Graci, 2010), since he estimates 80% of the community reads the paper.

The fourth leader is the superintendent of the school district. Despite the school district's decreasing budget, he has supported the ESL program, hiring multilingual professionals, and the newcomer's program. He has promoted tolerance within the schools, as well as in the community.

These leaders are all from different sectors of the community, their stance towards integration and collaboration has affected each sector in the community. Other outside sources have noticed the good that these leaders have done in the community. One participant commented, "I've been impressed by their community. And it has been the community leaders like [the director of One Morgan County], police chief, the school district, all of those people in community leader positions. It seems to have been really willing to work with refugees to bridge the gaps [to meet refugee needs]."

Leadership was also focused on in this study because Fort Morgan has developed a very unique leadership position within their community that can be recreated in other communities. Fort Morgan, through One Morgan County, has developed a new style of non-profit director, which I will term the keystone coordinator. The role of a keystone coordinator is to be a centralized hub of collaborative activity in the community, as well as to build relationships and social capital. In many ways the director of One Morgan County is like a keystone in a bridge. A keystone is the center stone on an arched bridge that holds together all the other arched stones; it is the connector between all stones. The director also serves as the connection point between

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all the different social services and institutions in Fort Morgan. If an agency does not know where to refer a refugee, they know they can always go to the director, who is aware of all the social services. Just like a keystone in a bridge, the director provides the connection points between two “stones,” or social services. She describes herself as a “hub of knowing what is out there” and is “a conduit for resources.”

For example, the local police department held a well-advertised meeting talking about the state of safety in Fort Morgan. The director attended, and commented that there were only about eight people in attendance. However, on another occasion, One Morgan County and the police department did a joint community meeting, and over 60 people attended. She commented, “it does make a difference that we go out and form the relationships and then bring them together.” Another example of the importance of her connections is that she is able to reach outside the community for both specialized expertise and funding. When Fort Morgan has needs, she can contact and ask the regional refugee resettlement organization for specialized help. She was also able to secure funding for the local public library to get new computers and ESL programs that would be beneficial to refugees. The city did not have the money in the budget to buy the computers, so she was able to ask the regional refugee resettlement organization for assistance. She commented, “because of our relationship with them [the refugee resettlement organization], I could advocate for the library and say, ‘you should do this, they play an important role in our community. You don't know them, but I know them, and you should support this.’” Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) claim that “social capital in the form of new relationships can facilitate information sharing to arrive at mutual understanding leading to more effective decision making, more efficient coordination, and increased capacity to respond to future challenges” (245).

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The main advantage of having a keystone coordinator is that not everyone in a rural community has to know everything about other services and what they provide. Through the interviews, one common thread that emerged was that the upper level administrators were very focused on collaboration, and were very familiar with all the other social services in Fort Morgan and could make good referrals. However, people who were on the front lines of refugee integration, such as teachers, knew less social services in town because their required a different focus. However, all teachers knew that they could always contact the director or their principal if they knew a student needed help to prevent them from slipping through the cracks. In a rural community, resources and human capital are much more restricted. The director is the only employee of One Morgan County, but she accomplishes an amazing amount because she harnesses her connections and relationships. Small communities do not need to hire a lot of staff to help their refugees integrate or form a large non-profit in their area. Rather, they need to leverage the established social services and collaborate amongst themselves. Only one person is needed to act as the Keystone Coordinator.

While there are many advantages of having a keystone coordinator, rural communities also need to be aware of the challenges of having one. The first challenge is that if the keystone coordinator retires or switches jobs, the relationships that they have formed will be weakened. The new coordinator will have to spend valuable time and energy to rebuild collaborative relationships. This is intensive work, and it may be challenging to keep a person for a prolonged period of time. One Morgan County has had three directors in its five year history. Another challenge of having a keystone coordinator is that they must remain accessible, even though they are the head and the main person facilitating collaboration in a community.

### **Using a Small Community Size Advantageously**

The second reason why Fort Morgan has been successful is that by using social capital, Fort Morgan has turned the apparent disadvantages of their rural setting into advantages to ensure that all refugees' needs are being met without having to duplicate services. The first advantage to being a small rural community is the community's size and proximity to other communities. Smaller communities generally have fewer social services and helpful tools, such as public transportation. They also generally lack specialized social agencies, such as agencies that are specifically for refugee resettlement. Instead of viewing their small size as being a hindrance, Fort Morgan used to their small size to build close relationships. For example, large urban organizations are often characterized by their impersonality and their lack of familiarity with other agencies to which to make referrals (Edwards, Torgerson, & Sattem, 2009). But in Fort Morgan, like many rural areas, "Small-town networks of relationships and communication are more dense than in more diffused urban areas," making it easier to see issues that need to be addressed, as well as "where offices are smaller and nearer to one another and where workers are more likely to know each other either through other local institutions or within a network of service providers (Edwards, Torgerson, & Sattem, 2009).

A second advantage of a small town is that trust and reciprocity are easier to foster. Wangers and Gimenez emphasized that in order to utilize social capital, there must be trust and reciprocity among participants. A third advantage of a small rural setting for integration is that there is less need for services to advertise since all the services are familiar with one another, and can refer refugees to the proper services (Director of Adult Basic Education, personal communication, 2011). A fourth advantage is that small communities can provide more individualized help and assistance to its refugees. For example, one refugee in the Workforce

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Education Program was originally an electrical engineer in the Congo. The program worked not only on getting his English up to speed, but also they specifically helped him learn English electrical terms. This man is now applying for electrical jobs, due to the specialized help he received in the small community (Director Workforce Education, personal communication, 2011). A sixth advantage is that in a small community, people are very aware of the gaps or cracks where there might be problems for refugees. Because of this, small communities can fix those gaps more quickly (Resettlement organization sub-office director, personal communication, 2011).

By utilizing the advantages of being a small, rural community, Fort Morgan is able to ensure that they do not duplicate services, and consequently are able to save resources from being used to cover a need that is already met. Collaboration “is absolutely essential to achieving the best usage of services and utilizing limited resources efficiently so that duplication of services may be avoided” (Tseng, Lui, & Wang, 2001, p.798). All the services are constantly communicating with each other about what services are needed and who should meet them. Tseng, Lui, and Wang (2001) write that “Interagency collaboration is absolutely essential to achieving the best usage of services and utilizing limited resources efficiently so that duplication of services may be avoided” (798). Fort Morgan is dedicated to “providing the best menu of services we can,” according to the superintendent of schools, “We know that we can’t do everything, but we can do more if we work together.” By not duplicating services, Fort Morgan is encouraging collaboration, and ensuring that funding is not being used to cover the same need twice.

All these advantages had lead up to Fort Morgan developing its social capital. Even though Fort Morgan may not have access to as many social services as large urban areas, they

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have not let their size be a hindrance, but rather they have collaborated and developed social capital. The superintendent commented that “I think that we realize, being a rural community, being blue collar community, not having lots financial means, you work together because you get more done that way. I think we have learned that lesson, and that has become an operating norm for the area.” Social capital is an incredibly important resource because it is flexible and creative. There will always be new and emerging challenges, and social capital will help overcomes and solve those challenges. The superintendent summed it up when he said, “How do you do more, with the same or even less resources? [It] cause us to be very creative.”

### **Suggestions for Other Rural Communities**

By analyzing and understanding Fort Morgan, we can use Fort Morgan as a model to look to when integrating refugees in other rural areas. One of Fort Morgan’s strengths is its leadership. Rural communities do not need to worry that they do not have anyone with leadership capabilities. Rather, being a leader is a conscious choice, and leadership research has shown that there is not one specific type of personality or set of characteristics that makes the ideal leader (Bennett, 2004). Robert Greenleaf, the pioneer of the idea of servant-leadership, described leaders as people who have “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Hanson, 2011, para 6). While leadership is instrumental, it takes great risks to become a leader: “The controversy of this work [refugee integration], real or perceived, has consequences... Their personal reputations are at stake and they are vulnerable to harsh criticism from community members who are unwilling to acknowledge the changing demographics” (Graci, 2010). Leaders, especially in small communities, must be willing to take risks.

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As for a community's ability to turn its apparent "disadvantages" into advantages, the community needs to focus on collaborating among organizations to make sure that all needs are met. Fort Morgan has demonstrated that one of the best ways to ensure useful communication is through starting an interagency coordinating council. In Fort Morgan, this council is the board of One Morgan County and its director. Councils would consist of members from different social organizations. Through this council, the various agencies could communicate the needs they see in the community to each other and discuss how to best meet these needs. This way, two agencies would not try to meet the same need. Tseng, Liu, and Wang (2011), commented that in an interagency coordinating committee, there must be member commitment so that networks of trust and reciprocity will be built. Rural communities do not necessarily need to set up their own non-profit, such as One Morgan County, but they need to have some sort of function body that works as an interagency council. The council could be as simple as having different organizations meet together for lunch once a month. However, communities should be aware that developing an interagency council, or any form of collaborative endeavor, is a challenging task that requires commitment (Tseng, Liu, Wang, 2011).

While refugee integration may seem a daunting task for other rural communities, success is possible if communities are willing to collaborate and develop their social capital. This case study of Fort Morgan has proven that refugees can be integrated in rural settings. Rural communities will have to approach refugee integration differently than urban communities, and they must rely more heavily on their social capital and their close relationships within a community. When asked whether Fort Morgan's successful integration could be repeated in another small community, the high school principal aptly responded:

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You just happen to have a group of people, willing in whatever area they are in, in whatever role they serve, say "we do believe in tolerance," and are willing to step up...So would it happen in a different community? If you have people that have strong enough personalities that are willing to take a stand. I believe it would. And I think that is what you are seeing in [Fort Morgan].

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