

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN OAKLAND:
IMPROVING THE VOLUNTEER-CLIENT ENCOUNTER

A Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kristin A. Keller

May 2013

© 2013

Kristin A. Keller

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Graduate Committee Approves the Project Report Titled

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN OAKLAND:
IMPROVING THE VOLUNTEER-CLIENT ENCOUNTER

by

Kristin A. Keller

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Dr. Roberto González, Department of Anthropology Date

Dr. Charles Darrah, Department of Anthropology Date

Dr. Sandra Cate, Department of Anthropology Date

ABSTRACT

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN OAKLAND: IMPROVING THE VOLUNTEER-CLIENT ENCOUNTER

By Kristin A. Keller

Refugee resettlement in the United States resembles emergency room triage. When refugees arrive they are served by overextended resettlement staff who have so many clients that their immediate concern is to hurriedly assess who needs what and how obtain it for them within a three-month service window. Due to inadequate policy measures, the US Refugee Admissions Program is underfunded, leaving the agencies that provide resettlement services understaffed. Resettlement agencies are characterized by organizational instability and are in a constant state of flux. These challenges result in a reliance on volunteers. Volunteers often spend the most time with clients, but due to resource limitations, they do not receive enough training to provide services as effectively or efficiently as they could with better instruction. Undoubtedly, this negatively affects the refugees they resettle. Following months of participant observation at a resettlement agency in Oakland, California, my organizational analysis led to the development and implementation of a Volunteer Toolkit meant to address gaps in volunteer training and incorporate tools to enhance orientation services for clients. Volunteers now have tools to prepare them for their work with refugee clients in advance, increasing their ability to improve resettlement outcomes. While this project culminated in a successful intervention for one refugee resettlement agency office, the apparent challenges that staff, volunteers and clients faced in my research reveal the broader shortcomings of policies that limit the resources resettlement agencies have to enable their clients to become self-sufficient.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone at the International Rescue Committee in Oakland who supported this project. Staff, volunteers, and clients were always happy to talk with me candidly about their experiences providing or receiving resettlement services. This project would not have been possible without their input and insight.

I have to express much gratitude to Dr. Roberto Gonzalez for giving me direction through this process and offering guidance when I was not sure where this project or report was going. I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Darrah who was always happy to help during my many visits to his office to run my ideas by him. Last, many thanks to Dr. Sandra Cate, who has been a mentor and support to me for many years, providing me with consistent and constructive feedback for this project and in terms of my academic endeavors more broadly.

I also have to thank my family and friends for their support through this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES	5
The Policy Setting	5
Policy in Practice	7
DEVELOPING A PROJECT AT THE GLOBAL AID AGENCY	16
Background: Volunteering at a Refugee Resettlement Agency	16
The Makings of a Research Project	25
Methods	30
THE GAA OAKLAND TODAY	36
An Organizational Approach	36
Staff	37
Volunteers and Interns	39
Clients	45
SUPPLEMENTING RECEPTION AND PLACEMENT SERVICES	50
IDENTIFYING SERVICE GAPS AND INFORMATION BARRIERS	55
Identifying Common Challenges for Volunteers: Resettlement	55
Identifying Common Challenges for Volunteers: Agency-wide	75
Identifying Common Challenges for Clients	80
Assessing Volunteer and Client Challenges with Staff	89
Designing the Intervention	95
The Volunteer Toolkit	101
ANTHROPOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE	107
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION	111
REFERENCES	119
APPENDIX A: The GAA Volunteer Toolkit	122

INTRODUCTION

Typically, studies of refugee resettlement in the United States focus on the experiences of particular ethnic populations and reveal the ongoing challenges they face in negotiating their traditions while navigating American bureaucratic systems. Often these studies find that refugees were placed in poverty upon arrival and were left to rely on welfare or menial labor while they struggled independently of the state to build diasporic communities and systems of mutual aid to overcome poverty. Scholars in this area often compare the structural positioning of refugees resettled in the US to the disenfranchisement of other groups who are systematically discriminated against based on race, ethnicity or religion. Essentially, refugees who are admitted to the US are not provided with the resources, skills, or economic support that would enable them to become self-sufficient in any sustainable manner.

Federal policy does allocate funds and resources for refugee resettlement and the government contracts work to organizations that carryout a US Refugee Admissions Program with the goal of empowering refugees to become economically self-sufficient. However, the provisions offered are inadequate and refugees are denied the extent of support they need to become financially secure and socially stable. Recent waves of refugees “have remained in the underclass as their local communities have been unable to integrate them into the local job market or to provide adequate education and English training” (Jeung et al., 2011:6).

In 2009, I volunteered at the Global Aid Agency¹ (GAA), an international NGO that is contracted by the Department of State to resettle refugees. Working at their Oakland, California office, I saw firsthand how resettlement policy is put into practice and how it shapes and constrains resettlement services. At the time, I observed gaps in communication between service providers and clients, as well as barriers that prevented the effective delivery of services. Due to the funding limitations intrinsic to resettlement policy, the organization was understaffed and relied on volunteers for providing the majority of face-to-face services. This experience inspired me to return to the GAA in 2012 as both a volunteer and researcher. I conducted exploratory research to identify service limitations, and uncover how and why these particular obstacles emerged. Given the findings, I designed an intervention that would improve resettlement outcomes for GAA clients. I took a holistic, open-systems approach, exploring the internal and external bureaucratic environment of the GAA, as well as the experiences and actions of staff, clients and volunteers at all points of the service encounter. Utilizing participant observation and interviewing, I wanted to make sense of organizational objectives and how they are mediated in practice.

My research culminated in an extensive organizational analysis and ethnography where I was able to identify several barriers to organizational efficiency. First, I found that volunteers were not provided with adequate training on the bureaucratic end, or guidance for successful communication on the client end. This impeded their ability to secure services and provide support for clients. Second, a Family Mentor program that

¹ The name “Global Aid Agency” is a pseudonym used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of those involved at the organization.

formerly provided refugee clients with in-home assistance was discontinued. The culmination of these changes led to an overall decrease in orientation support for refugee clients who need to learn about the social, economic, and service systems in their new environment quickly because they receive support from the GAA for a limited amount of time. While it was clear to staff, volunteers and clients that particular problems arose in a multitude of service encounters, they were rarely able to explain why and how these issues occurred, much less identify measures for resolving them.

In consultation with GAA staff, I created an intervention to address the most critical service and information gaps, which were rooted in restricted organizational capacity that prevented adequate volunteer training. I created a Volunteer Toolkit to educate volunteers about the GAA office in Oakland, the services provided, instructions for carrying out basic resettlement duties, as well as a guide for how to communicate with clients that encourages volunteers to use particular tools and topics to better meet client needs. Although there were some barriers to implementation, staff and volunteers were highly receptive, and the supplemental training offered in the Volunteer Toolkit has been extremely valuable. Not only have volunteers been using the Volunteer Toolkit, but staff have as well, and they have begun to work on expanding it by adding new materials and organizing them in the manner that is most applicable for different volunteer programs.

By identifying and targeting the most significant, yet basic daily barriers to effective service delivery, this intervention will ameliorate subsequent service delivery issues identified in this report. Volunteers at the GAA Oakland are now more prepared to carry out everyday tasks and they have enhanced tools to inform their work with refugee clients, increasing their ability to improve resettlement outcomes. The success of this

project reveals that specialized volunteer projects can ease the strain that overburdened resettlement organizations face. Whether it should be the task of service providers or volunteers to intervene when government policy is inadequate is another issue altogether. This ethnography reveals acute needs at the GAA Oakland, an office with extremely dedicated staff and volunteers, but where resources are so strained they often work on a triage basis to determine which clients need which services or assistance merely to survive.

The nature of the barriers identified in this report, which are common to many resettlement agencies, indicate system-wide inefficiencies that result from misguided policy objectives and inadequate funding. The literature on resettlement agencies reveals similar findings at all levels of the US Refugee Admissions Program and illustrate that policy deficiencies have serious effects on refugees resettled in the United States. Policy dictates that resettlement organizations have up to three months to provide refugees with the skills they need to become self-sufficient, and this coincides with supplemental funding for refugees that is entirely inadequate for starting a new life in the US. For refugees who have limited work experience and no English skills upon arrival, this is an implausible task. At the same time, this is the policy environment that resettlement agencies are required to operate in.

Organizations like the GAA are constantly working on research to promote policy change, but the government is slow to respond. If one thing is clear from my work at the GAA in Oakland, it is that hardworking service providers do everything they can to ensure the survival of their clients, but have little time or funding to develop the level of services refugees need to be self-sufficient with any chance for upward mobility. While

this report outlines my project, it also reveals how everyday service encounters shed light on the complex connections between policy, practice, and resettlement outcomes that are often overlooked by social scientists and policy makers.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

The Policy Setting

Since 1948, refugees have been admitted to the United States for permanent resettlement (US ORR). The US “refugee” designation is defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 101(a)42, drawing on the United Nations (UN) 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocols on Refugee Status Determination: “Any 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 and 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” (Refugee Council USA).

According to the Government Accountability Office (2012), 56,000 refugees were admitted to the United States in 2011. Each year the president determines how many refugees will be admitted to the US and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reviews refugee applications, approving or denying their resettlement. The Department of State (DOS) then assigns admitted refugees to one of nine nonprofit voluntary agencies (volag) that will oversee the resettlement process. Jointly, the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and the Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office of Refuge Resettlement (ORR) monitor and fund state-mandated services for refugees, which are provided directly by volags and state social service agencies.

When refugees enter the United States, these volags, contracted by the Department of State, assign their clients to a specific destination for resettlement based on community capacity, and the presence of an affiliate office, where they can provide refugees with casework support. Under the US Refugee Admissions Program, PRM funds these volags to provide the “Reception and Placement” (R&P) program. R&P services entail up to 90 days of support, where volag caseworkers secure housing, food, healthcare and other services for their clients from the day they arrive in the US until the end of the R&P period. For each individual refugee a volag resettles, that agency receives \$1,850 (US GAO 2012:7). The goal of the R&P program is to provide each refugee with the skills, services, and employment they need to become financially self-sufficient over that time period. Resettlement agencies work on a case-by-case basis, and each case may include a single individual or a primary applicant accompanied by their immediate family.

The ORR oversees programs that combine cash assistance and job training to further support refugees on their path to independence from the government-funded services they receive when they first arrive. This includes the provision of social service grants for state-level welfare programs for refugees, such as refugee cash assistance, as well as Matching Grant funds that are provided directly to volags, which provide their own job training and cash assistance program for the refugees they resettle (US GAO 2012: 8-10). The PRM monitors the R&P program, and the ORR measures service effectiveness based on “employment outcomes and cash assistance terminations” (US GAO 2012:26), indicating that the goal is to ensure the successful integration of refugees

into American society, although they currently have no stated measures for assessing that integration.

Policy in Practice

The Global Aid Agency (GAA), an organization that provides the majority of its refugee aid services internationally, is one of the volags contracted by the DOS to provide resettlement services, and the GAA Oakland is one of their affiliate offices that carries out the resettlement. The GAA Oakland provides R&P services, as well as a Matching Grant program, although clients who are ineligible for Matching Grant support receive Refugee Cash Assistance through the Alameda County Social Service Agency. In addition to these two main resettlement programs, the Oakland office provides additional support in the form of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, immigration support services, and emerging programs for health, food handling certification, and a micro-finance agriculture program. However, given the limitations of government funding for resettlement services, the GAA, like many other resettlement organizations, has a difficult time meeting the overarching policy goals of refugee integration and economic self-sufficiency. In a study of Burmese refugees in Oakland, Jeung et al. (2011) found that refugees struggle greatly with adapting to the low-income, urban environment of Oakland, which has historically seen high crime rates, and is still recovering from the 2008 financial crisis, as indicated by the high unemployment rate (Jeung et al. 2011). In Oakland, the GAA specifically resettles Burmese, Bhutanese, Iraqi, Sri Lankan, Afghan and Eritrean refugees, with the goal of building ethnic enclave communities. Not surprisingly, each population is hugely diverse when it comes to English language skills,

job experience, familiarity with bureaucratic systems, and so on. Some clients require far more support than others to get to the point of economic self-reliance.

One of the most crucial aspects of resettlement services is orientation support. All R&P caseworkers provide orientations to their clients, but most clients require a great deal of additional support, beyond that which a caseworker can provide. William S. Bernard (1974) stresses that adequate orientation and counseling services are crucial if refugees are to integrate successfully in a new country where they are expected to become self-sufficient quickly. As opposed to assimilation, “integration occurs when the newcomer is able to operate effectively in the new society and participate in its affairs satisfactorily without losing all of his original ethnic identity and shedding all of his old cultural values and practices” (196). In his list of recommendations for meeting the needs of new refugees, he stresses that services must be extended further down the line to ensure that refugees have opportunities for upward mobility. Once they have secured initial housing and employment services, additional support should be provided to ensure they are able to upgrade in the job market, find better housing and even seek professional training. Unfortunately, the current state of resettlement services in the US fall far short of Bernard’s recommendations (Erickson 2012; Jeung 2011; Keles 2008; Nawyn 2010; Ong 2008).

While international migration is a challenge for any individual, the transition can seem insurmountable for refugees who don’t speak English, who do not have access to adequate English training and who are subsequently excluded from many of the “survival jobs” on which so many refugees become dependent. In the case of Burmese refugees in Oakland, many of them arrive with no English language or job skills, but they are subject

to the same expectation of self-sufficiency as any other refugee. They are eligible for the same amount of funding and duration of support as refugees who are highly educated, fluent in English, and had long-term employment in a highly skilled profession prior to displacement. In studies that assess refugee needs following resettlement, refugees consistently list access to ESL education as the most dire need that they have, and as the biggest barrier to their ability to meet their other crucial needs, including job training, healthcare, and access to other government and public services (Erwin et al 2001; Jeung et al 2011; Keles 2008).

In recent years, scholars, policy makers, and resettlement agencies have grown concerned with the United States' ability to accommodate the current population of incoming refugees with the limited federal funds provided (Brick et al. 2010). Brick et al. (2010) conducted a study of the refugee resettlement protocol in the United States and concluded that the US Refugee Admissions Program will have to make significant changes to its policies in order to address programmatic shortcomings that thwart the ability of refugee resettlement agencies to provide successful services (Brick et al. 2010:iii). Fethi Keles (2008) concludes that current resettlement policy, which focuses solely on rapid employment, provides insufficient opportunity for adequate adjustment and language acquisition, leaving refugees structurally neglected and economically marginalized. Since resettlement services are directly linked to welfare services, resettlement policy is shaped by the political discourse that politicians use to frame public opinion about state assistance, as well as characterizations of who is deserving or undeserving of that support.

Influenced by neoliberal trends to defund the public sector and discourage citizens from relying on state assistance, resettlement policy has been shaped by “a cultural logic that generally considers adaptation to be a matter of economic independence and self-sufficiency” (Keles 2008:6), which may not be compatible with or applicable to refugee conceptions of successful integration. In her study of Cambodian refugees, Aihwa Ong (2003) notes that there exists a “tension between the American stress on individualism, pragmatism, and materialism on the one hand, and the Khmer-Buddhist ethos of compassionate hierarchy, collectivism, and otherworldliness on the other” (7). These divergent values are difficult to reconcile in light of the US’ citizen-making policies that diminish cultural and social pluralism in favor of individual economic self-reliance. If you are resettled in the US, you are expected to participate in the capitalist-oriented job market, which is unfamiliar for refugees who traditionally relied on subsistence farming for survival, and who might prosper if presented with familiar economic opportunities.

Ong asserts that worthy citizenship in the US is based on one’s ability to “reduce his or her burden on the society” (2003:12) by overcoming any reliance on state support and becoming a productive worker or entrepreneur. If citizenship in the US is framed on a continuum from worthy to unworthy, it is also highly racialized, ranging from white to black, as indicated by “the assigning of racializing labels – model minority, refugee, underclass, welfare mother” (Ong 2003:13). Such categorizations alone can serve to justify inequality on the basis of cultural deviance and they render invisible a lack of access to resources that would provide refugees with the skills they need to rise out of the poverty they are placed in during resettlement. Stephanie J. Nawyn (2010) argues that policy makers need to recognize the constraints of current welfare state policy on

resettlement organizations, which are prevented from challenging the social, political and economic forces that marginalize the people they seek to help. Until that happens, resettlement organizations will continue to struggle without success to provide services that equip all refugees with tools for upward mobility and maintaining their cultural livelihood. Nawyn explains:

“most volags provided an opportunity structure that reproduced gender and racial/ethnic hierarchies in the job market. That is not to say that volag staff intended or wanted to support those hierarchies. Rather, their mandate to help refugees achieve independence from the welfare state left them little choice” (2010:163).

Since studies show that federal policy fails to produce effective opportunities for upward mobility among refugees resettled in the US, we can better understand why with an examination of how the volags that carryout resettlement are restricted in particular ways. One common feature of the resettlement program in the US is a reliance on volunteers for providing services. Due to funding constraints, resettlement organizations could not provide the extent of services they currently do without volunteer support (Erickson 2012). In one study, volunteers were vital in providing day-to-day assistance and were seen as particularly dedicated to helping recently resettled refugees locate jobs, accompanying them to appointments, showing them how to access healthcare support from home, and providing ESL tutoring (Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny 2011). Jennifer Erickson (2012) points out that refugee resettlement has historically been a volunteer-based endeavor in the United States until the 1990s, at which time the professionalization

of resettlement services and staff was in full-force. Despite this shift, “the institution remains predicated upon a public/private design that relies heavily on a wide array of local community institutions, for example, employers, teachers, welfare workers, and volunteers” (Erickson 2012:168). Indeed, most organizations have just enough funding to staff the required positions, and from there, they turn to volunteers and community representatives for help. Because of the large size of client caseloads, agency staff often have little time for volunteer oversight.

In her study of volunteers in Fargo, North Dakota, Erickson (2012) shows that volunteers who have a considerable amount of contact with refugee clients, simultaneously “uphold and contest mainstream ideas about race, class, gender, and culture” (169) that shape client knowledge and service outcomes. Since the elderly volunteers she spoke with had altruistic motivations, she found that some were able to combat xenophobia and discrimination in their encounters with clients, while others “demonstrated fear, racism and prejudice against refugees as well as a strong sense of paternalism” (2012:171). One elderly volunteer compared Sudanese refugees “with her stereotypical views of urban African American families as single mothers and violent men living in poverty” (2012:173). Another seemed compelled to “teach” refugees how to be good American citizens, “rather than collaborate with or learn from them” (2012:174). This is hardly surprising since resettlement organizations are rarely able to uphold measures for accountability or provide their volunteers with sufficient training. At one organization Erickson observed, “volunteers faced no reporting activities, no training, and no background checks” (2012:169).

On the client end, my research at the GAA in Oakland illustrated the everyday manifestations of policy, funding, and service constraints that are identified in the research on the US Refugee Admissions Program. Refugees who spoke decent English, had at least the equivalent of a high school education, and/or were familiar with similar bureaucratic systems and services, were frustrated that they had little choice but to take a “survival job.” Sometimes these clients were able to find more desirable jobs over time and save enough money to pursue education and certification that would enable them to find work that was comparable to their former profession. However, refugees who did not have these pre-established skills prior to arriving in America had little opportunity to gain such experience during or after resettlement.

In their study on the status of Burmese refugees resettled in Oakland since 2007, Jeung et al. (2011) found that although many of them had been in the US for several years, “nearly 60% (of) refugees surveyed lived under the federal threshold for extreme poverty,” 40% reported that they didn’t speak any English, and 63% were unemployed (2). The top need listed by these refugees was access to English language classes, however, following the recession, most adult English as a Second Language classes in Oakland were discontinued. Classes that were available were inadequate for those who did not read or write, and teachers were unable to communicate with clients who were starting with the basics. Further, ethnic minority refugees from Burma, such as the Karen or Karenni, were unable to locate professional interpreters who spoke their language and could assist them at social services, social security, or the hospital. The authors explain that the, “lack of English and unemployment exacerbate other top community problems,

such as adjustment to their new community; securing government benefits; and access to healthcare and mental health services” (2011:4).

What is most alarming in recent studies on resettlement is that many refugees state that if they knew life in the United States would be so hard given the lack of support and resources, they may not have come, and/or they prefer to go back to their last country of asylum (Chang 2010; Gerstler-Holton 2011; Jeung et al. 2011; Keles 2008). For refugees in Oakland who are living with trauma from war and displacement, they “arrived to discover themselves in the middle of another hostile environment – urban American during the worst economic crisis in generations” (Chang 2010). One Burmese refugee in Oakland stated, “If I had a job, life here would be better than the refugee camp, because we have a house and I could pay the bills...since I have no job, I would rather go back to living in the refugee camp” (Jeung et al. 2011:3). Though this is not necessarily a representative sentiment among refugees resettled in the US, the commonality of this perspective is significant. Some refugees felt safer in the camps or in their native country than they do in Oakland, and still others have noted that at least in the camp they spoke a common language and were able to communicate with other people (Chang 2010; Gerstler-Holton 2011).

While the inspiration for my project at the GAA in Oakland stems from my earlier experience volunteering there, it is clear that the barriers I observed, at that time and currently, extend far beyond Oakland and the GAA. Gaps in information, training and orientation support for service providers and refugees are a common problem rooted at the policy level. At the same time, resettlement agencies face differing challenges based on specific local conditions. The project I undertook at the GAA Oakland has

implications for other resettlement agencies, and this is indicated in the work of other social scientists, like Jennifer Erickson (2012), who also created volunteer training materials to improve the volunteer-client service encounter in Fargo. At the same time, I was also able to tailor my research and the resulting intervention to address particular challenges that are specific to Oakland's urban environment, the student volunteers, and the needs of local refugee populations.

For those working to enhance resettlement services, addressing local challenges to refugee resettlement is crucial because policy does not account for differences in cost of living, crime rates, amount of community resources, or unemployment. In fact, the policy dictates that the volunteers themselves resettle their clients based on their own determination of community capacity. However, community capacity can vary in significant ways. For example, Oakland may have high crime and unemployment rates, but it also has a wealth of organizations that serve immigrant populations and a K-12 educational system that is far more adept at serving English language learners than other locations where there may be more job availability and a lower cost of living. If the policy provided opportunities for tailoring services and funding to the needs of each site of resettlement and each refugee population, organizations would be better able to meet the needs of their clients. Until that happens, service providers, volunteers, and refugees can all participate in research, advocacy, education, and community capacity building projects that will improve service outcomes.

DEVELOPING A PROJECT AT THE GLOBAL AID AGENCY

Background: Volunteering at a Refugee Resettlement Agency

Over the summer of 2009, I volunteered as a resettlement casework assistant at the Global Aid Agency (GAA) in Oakland. I was referred to the GAA by a friend who had been volunteering there as a family mentor, where he provided direct support to recently resettled refugees. Family mentors worked with clients on weekends and evenings, providing assistance with homework and English language learning, taking kids on daytrips, and showing clients how to navigate their new environment on a daily basis (i.e. how to take the bus, communicate with teachers, use the library, locate community resources, and so on).

Casework assistants, like myself, helped families before and after arrival. In addition to renting and setting up housing, we assisted clients in securing essential services and documents such as Food Stamps and Social Security cards. We also provided guidance and advocacy to help refugees learn how to navigate American bureaucratic institutions such as hospitals and banks. Other services offered at the Oakland office included a matching grant employment assistance program, ESL classes, and volunteer-led projects like community gardening and soccer for kids. The GAA also provided a variety of immigration services for refugees and asylees who had been in the US for some time, including assistance with family reunification, green cards and naturalization².

² Refugees are admitted to the US as permanent “non-citizens” and are required to apply for green cards after one year in the country. They can apply for citizenship five years after arrival.

Like most offices in the United States that provide Reception and Placement (R&P) services to refugees, the GAA office relied mainly on volunteers to carry out direct support to clients in the field, while caseworkers and staff dealt with logistical matters from the office. Caseworkers would keep track of which clients needed to go to Social Services or the Health Clinic on a given day, and the volunteer coordinator would determine which volunteers could assist the clients in completing these tasks. This system was similar for other departments, such as Employment and Immigration, which relied on the same volunteer coordinator to delegate volunteer duties. While volunteers who worked in the office had direct, daily contact with caseworkers and staff, family mentors were very much removed from the office as their work with clients occurred outside of office hours, and they were supervised solely by the volunteer coordinator.

As a casework assistant, I often worked with clients throughout their first three months in the country. Over the first couple of weeks, we ensured that clients attained proper identification, registered with the necessary administrative governmental departments, and secured the services they would need to survive. These services were crucial because clients would have to rely on themselves to get by, or turn to other programs for support, after the 90-day R&P period (US GAO 2012).

Caseworkers generally incorporated a significant orientation element to their work, since their clients had a very short amount of time to learn how to manage services, appointments, paperwork, and bills. At the GAA, longer term support was offered through the family mentor program, where volunteers were asked to give a commitment of at least six months to work with an individual client or a family, and it was common they would continue to assist after that. An additional longer-term service was the

matching grant employment program, where clients who were considered employable would receive extended cash assistance, along with support in building résumés and scheduling interviews, as well as job training and ESL classes. Generally, anyone who expressed interest in finding a job upon arrival was considered employable, although space in the program was limited. For those who were unable to find jobs, often the only other option for financial support beyond an initial R&P grant of \$1,125 was to apply for Refugee Cash Assistance through the CalWORKS program.

Overall, clients appeared to have a thorough introduction to life in the United States that included an official orientation provided by GAA staff, general support for everyday matters via family mentors, and guidance provided by casework volunteers who accompanied clients to apply for services and attend appointments. Staff also took the time to explain to clients what would be expected of them as they embarked on their path to citizenship. While no one expected clients to become “acculturated,” and most staff and volunteers were respectful of clients’ social/cultural expectations and choices in terms of how they built a life in the United States, the policy aspect of resettlement in the US was obviously limiting. Clients aren’t able to choose where in the United States they are resettled, they are required to have mandatory health screenings and engage with institutions that regulate their daily lives in ways they may be unfamiliar, such as social services programs that mandate particular types of job training. They are also compelled to choose between finding survival employment or securing welfare until they can find survival employment. While these limitations were certainly beyond the scope of control of GAA staff, there were significant gaps in terms of R&P services that could have been improved for the benefit of the clients. The foremost barrier was language. While some

clients spoke decent or even fluent English, just as many arrived with no English language skills. Many refugees faced severe linguistic isolation, and this is very common among ethnic minority populations, such as the Karenni or Chin (who spoke Karenni or Chin, respectively) of Burma, which made it challenging and sometimes impossible for staff to find interpretation assistance (Jeung et al. 2011). While language seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle, other barriers resulted from a lack of adequate volunteer training and prevented volunteers from serving clients effectively.

While the volunteer coordinator at the GAA encouraged volunteers to learn about the “cultures” and political circumstances of the very diverse refugee populations we resettled, characterized by citizenship and/or ethnic group, this wasn’t a requirement. While some of us did take the time to do so, many did not. Volunteers often asked basic questions of the busy staff, such as why the Bhutanese refugees spoke Nepali, and at times asked questions that may have been offensive if directed to the clients, revealing some unquestioned ignorance and a lack of sensitivity. Additionally, many volunteers were not from Oakland, and were inexperienced with social service and civic bureaucracies, which hindered their ability to provide effective support. Most volunteers were students from local universities fulfilling community services requirements or hoping to get the type of experience that would benefit them professionally in the future. Others came to the GAA because they simply wanted to support displaced people during a difficult transition. Some staff and volunteers were refugees themselves, or immigrants who were familiar with the particular circumstances of displacement for certain populations.

Unfortunately, a lack of volunteer education culminated in frequent miscommunication with clients and errors that impeded the efficient provision of services. Beyond a basic orientation to the GAA and the daily support of the volunteer coordinator, there was a “learn as you go” sort of attitude since staff didn’t have the time or resources to provide us with in-depth training. For example, after clients arrived, casework volunteers were expected to take them to appointments on the bus, and give them a “bus orientation” in the process. This meant showing them how to use the bus for the first time, yet often, the volunteer was also taking the bus for the first time. This resulted in a very common scenario: a volunteer who was sent out to teach a client, or clients, how to do something, found himself feeling and looking confused, possibly making mistakes and giving misinformation then (ideally) correcting himself, because he was trying to simultaneously explain how to do something that he, himself, was in the process of learning.

In one extreme case, a volunteer shared an account where he found himself uncomfortable in an environment that was unfamiliar to him. This young volunteer, who had just moved to San Francisco months earlier, returned to the office one day after taking some clients to the Health Center. He appeared to be upset, and when I asked what was wrong he told me that this was the first time he had ever taken a public bus, and that from the moment he boarded the bus with the family, he felt fearful and threatened by the appearance of some of the passengers. As he continued his story, it appeared that no one on the bus had actually done anything threatening, but he possessed some racialized stereotypes that left him feeling insecure as a white male on a bus full of young men of color who were dressed in a manner that he associated with criminality. He said

that he really didn't feel this was a safe environment for the family because he perceived the people on the bus to be dangerous although he had no evidence that any of them were. When I asked him which family he went with, he explained that they were from Burma, but after a couple minutes, he changed his mind and said they were from Bhutan, which also indicated that he hadn't taken the time to familiarize himself with the family.

This scenario was alarming and I was concerned about this individual's ability to serve the clients, given his stigma of the surrounding urban environment and his failure to get to know the people he was working with, or look at their casefile before working with them. Being a volunteer myself, I tried to share with him accounts that would counter the stereotypes he seemed to be invoking, but I was also concerned about how he perceived the clients. This volunteer's lack of awareness was uncommon at the GAA. However, it revealed that the failure to provide mandatory training to volunteers about the clients, as well as the environment in which they were to be resettled, was problematic. Without identifying this individual, I shared what I heard with the volunteer coordinator. He was very responsive to my concerns, and explained that there were so many clients arriving and so few volunteers, that they were taking on most applicants who seemed committed. The volunteer coordinator was aware of these shortcomings given the lack of training, but with his mountain of work duties, which included casework carry-over, he was not able to provide support beyond the training resources he emailed to volunteers (which they were then expected to review on their own time), and the verbal instructions he would provide on a daily basis. He compared the current situation to how it was before he was hired as the volunteer coordinator, when he, himself, was a volunteer. Before he joined the staff, they had been stricter about screening, but this meant fewer volunteers, and

often a trip to Social Services meant one volunteer assisting several families at a time, which led to a very stressful environment for both the clients and the volunteers. When he became volunteer coordinator his goal was to have one volunteer available to assist each family out in the field (i.e. to go to social services or the clinic). Even if the volunteers didn't have the best training, the one-on-one ratio was assumed to be an improvement.

Over my summer at the GAA I learned that the volunteer coordinator was very close with the clients, who saw him as a friendly and reliable source of support and advocacy. Although he worked beyond full-time at the office, he would also visit families and clients after work and on weekends, going beyond the duties of his job, and building personal relationships with them. While this may indicate a lack of boundaries on his part, it also indicated why and how the family mentor program was so strong: he was checking up on mentors and their clients regularly. He was also able to report to caseworkers when clients who didn't have family mentors were struggling at home, at work or at school. At the same time, the informal aspect of the staff-client relationship that he modeled for volunteers may have led them to feel too relaxed about the nature of their communication with clients.

Some volunteers failed to understand that since the Reception and Placement program only funded three months of resettlement services that clients would not receive casework support after that time. Volunteers only came to comprehend which information was most essential in communicating with clients when staff members explicitly outlined the consequences clients could face if they did not learn how to navigate these bureaucratic systems on their own. The worst-case scenario was that

clients might fail to submit the required social service reports and lose their cash and food assistance, or that they might fail to respond to medical bills with the correct Medi-Cal information and end up with massive debts. For these reasons, it was crucial that volunteers attempted to find the middle ground between casual communication and ensuring that clients understood how to manage their everyday lives in the American context.

While cultural competency and sensitivity was one area of concern when it came to volunteer-client communication, the topic was addressed often in the office among staff and volunteers through informal conversation. Unfortunately, what was often under-analyzed was the actual content of the information that was communicated to clients, which was of equal importance. Due to their lack of familiarity with the environment of Oakland and the services clients received, volunteers were often unable to provide information in these areas, and staff tried their best to compensate. At the same time, the most basic information was often taken for granted or overlooked, especially since social and cultural meanings had to be carefully and creatively translated. This issue was most apparent when it came to personal safety. Oakland is known for its rough, urban environment, and it is not a cheap place to live compared to other enclaves of refugee resettlement, which meant that clients often ended up living in low-income areas with greater incidence of crime. Due to these circumstances, it would be logical that personal safety would be one of the more important topics to address during resettlement. During the official orientation, caseworkers covered personal safety in all seriousness, yet due to language barriers, varying social conceptions of personal safety and crime, and a lack of repetition, the information did not always carry over to the clients as intended.

One day while I was in the office organizing files with a caseworker, a client and leader in the local Bhutanese refugee community came in very upset with an urgent matter to discuss. He rushed into the office where we were working and explained that the Bhutanese refugees in Oakland's Fruitvale district were being targeted by thieves, insinuating that the local perpetrators of such crime had come to learn that the Bhutanese were easy victims and were singling them out. It turned out that several Bhutanese men and women had been mugged while walking about the neighborhood and robbed on the bus over the past two weeks. Bhutanese refugees had been resettled in the area over recent years, and at this point there was a decent sized community in the area. The caseworker expressed concern and assured the man that he didn't believe the Bhutanese were being singled out necessarily in comparison to other ethnic populations, but that their neighborhood was a high-crime area, and this was why the caseworkers had instructed them how to be safe during the orientation. He reminded the man that they should not go out alone at night to walk around the neighborhood, and that they were safest if they sat at the front of the bus. He explained that he too was concerned and that he would try to organize an in-depth safety training for the Bhutanese community to address these problems. Still upset, but somewhat appeased that he had been heard and that the caseworker would take action, the man left the office.

I turned to the caseworker and inquired about the muggings. He explained that one young man was robbed while walking by the public housing projects late at night on his way home from work, and that one of the young women was targeted on the bus and hit in the face by her assailants. Several of the accounts seemed to indicate that the personal safety orientation provided by caseworkers was not sufficient, and that clients

weren't necessarily sure how to be safe, yet some amount of crime was likely unavoidable. We briefly discussed how hard it was to translate information about practicing personal safety in the area because, on the one hand, no one wanted to upset or scare the clients, but the reality was that they were living in a potentially dangerous area, and as immigrants who often carried cash (albeit very little cash), they were probably seen as easier targets. Communicating information effectively about personal safety was another area that seemed to require greater attention on the part of staff and volunteers.

Soon after this incident, my schedule changed and I stopped volunteering at the GAA. However, much of what I had observed stuck with me, especially the frequency of miscommunication and the apparent shortcomings of orientation support provided to GAA clients regarding their new environment. Unfortunately it is common for refugees to feel alone and isolated following resettlement, and even when there is a substantial ethnic community present, refugees often feel like outsiders in their new country (Chang 2011). Feelings of isolation are easily compounded by being thrust into an area with high crime where refugees don't feel safe, are unable to access longer-term support for English language learning and employment training, and may be struggling with the trauma related to their displacement experience back home.

The Makings of a Research Project

Motivated by my experience, I approached graduate school with the intention of developing a research project that would promote improved services for recently resettled refugees in Oakland. While there are many challenges to living in Oakland, there are also

many benefits for refugees who find themselves in a diverse environment with the possibility of finding familiar religious establishments, social organizations and foods. Additional perks in Oakland include an array of organizations that serve immigrant populations, a greater possibility of finding interpreters, and mild weather. While it was clear that the limitations to satisfactory resettlement were primarily rooted in problematic policies at the national and international level, there appeared to be identifiable fissures in GAA service delivery, and I hoped to go back and create a modest intervention to fill one of those gaps.

While planning for my return to the GAA in 2012, I conducted an internet search to see if there had been any news about the GAA Oakland office since my time there. To my surprise, I found three articles published in local newspapers regarding the challenges of resettlement for refugees in Oakland (Chang 2010; Gerstler-Holton 2011; and Chang 2012). Momo Chang (2010) and Jordan Gerstler-Holton (2011) addressed the resettlement experiences of Karenni and Iraqi refugee populations. Their interviewees shared numerous stories about dealing with crime, and being unable to find ESL classes or reliable work in light of the recent financial crisis. The Oakland Adult school, for example, was limiting its ESL instruction to only one course (Jeung et al. 2011). Several interviewees stated that if they knew their lives in the United States were going to be so challenging, they would have stayed where they were. Both articles mentioned the GAA, explaining how little funding the organization received to resettle their clients, and pointing ultimately to the deficient policies of the United States Resettlement Program, which seemed to position recently resettled refugees into a vulnerable underclass status. In 2012, Momo Chang revisited the situation among Karenni refugees in Oakland

following a study conducted by San Francisco State University and Burma Family Refugee Network, which examined the ongoing plight of the population (Jeung et al. 2011). Looking beyond the initial reactions of the Karenni to life in Oakland, Chang revealed that years later many Karenni remained unemployed, in poverty, and underserved by agencies that provide support to immigrants and refugees. As an ethnic minority from Burma, the Karenni fled to over-crowded and resource-poor Thai refugee camps. Upon resettlement, they came to Oakland with no English language skills, and often only a minimal (if any) understanding of Burmese. There were very few Karenni speakers available to interpret for them, which made their transition nearly impossible. Arriving in the midst severe budget cuts to ESL programs and Social Services, the Karenni found themselves stuck in limbo when compared to other refugee populations resettled in Oakland. The Iraqis and Bhutanese, for example, generally arrived with some English language ability or job experience. For those who did not, it was far easier to find interpreters who spoke Arabic or Nepali.

Their findings supported my earlier observations, and as a graduate student, I felt I was in a unique position to offer my time and research skills to the GAA. Before the summer of 2012 I contacted the new volunteer and intern coordinator at the GAA Oakland office. I explained that I was interested in returning as a volunteer, and in conducting research as a part of my MA project, with the goal of designing an intervention that would improve client services in some way.

In my initial proposal I focused on the possibilities of improving orientation support for clients. I identified personal safety challenges an example of orientation content, and explained that a subsequent solution may be designing a volunteer-led

workshop, since GAA staff resources were often maxed out. Another example I provided was creating an enhanced orientation manual that highlighted specific needs and focused on connecting clients to local resources beyond the GAA. While these examples pinpointed safety and client orientation, I made it clear that this project would be tailored to address the current needs of GAA clients. Nicole³, the new volunteer and intern coordinator, responded to my research proposal with uncertainty, explaining that they had several new programs and projects underway, but that I should definitely start back as a volunteer and feel out the possibilities for a project. I decided to wait until I met her and had my foot in the door to pursue the project further.

On the day of the volunteer orientation, I ran into Andrew, one of the former caseworkers, who was now the administrative Office Manager. I explained that I was back to volunteer and hoped to conduct my MA project at the organization. He was supportive and explained that the GAA had gone through many changes. At the orientation, Nicole introduced herself and explained that while her title was “Volunteer and Intern Coordinator,” she was actually working extensively in development. While she was the main recruiter of volunteers and interns, the actual on-the-job training would be provided by a staff supervisor, who each volunteer would assist directly. Since the orientation was organized to address all volunteers regardless of the program they were interested in, it focused extensively on the major programs of the Global Aid Agency, both internationally and nationally, but failed to address the particular services offered at the GAA in Oakland. Volunteer opportunities consisted of resettlement support, client coordination/front desk support, in-kind donation support, employment program support,

³ I use pseudonyms for all participants to protect their confidentiality.

health access support, and English class support. Following the orientation, prospective volunteers were asked to complete an in-depth application, submit it to Nicole, and once approved, follow up with an official background check. As a former volunteer, what stood out most about the volunteer orientation was the absence of information about the GAA programs provided in Oakland, and the vague descriptions of the volunteer positions.

On my first day back as a casework assistant, I met with Nicole to complete the remaining volunteer paperwork. I asked her about my proposal and explained in more detail what I was interested in doing. Verbal communication appeared to clear up some of her confusion, and she expressed support for the exploratory project. I explained that even as a volunteer, I could still conduct participant observation. Based on my contact with staff, volunteers and clients, I would conduct interviews (with informed consent) and identify one or more service gaps through an informal needs assessment. This would be followed by a written proposal to the Executive Director with a description of the problem and a possible intervention/s. Following consultation with him, I would then design and implement the intervention. Nicole agreed to the project and signed a letter of support to include with my Institutional Review Board application. I explained that once I received IRB approval, I would begin my research, keeping fieldnotes on the daily operations of the office. Once those details were finalized, Nicole introduced me to Clare, the caseworker I would be assisting. Unlike my earlier volunteer experience, I would work exclusively with Clare and her clients from Burma, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Once a volunteer was connected to their supervisor, they would have very little contact with Nicole.

Methods

It was clear from my first day back at the GAA in Oakland that many changes had occurred since I'd left in 2009. This was not particularly surprising, as resettlement work is known for high staff and volunteer turnover. For staff, the work is often time-consuming, requiring a commitment beyond the typical 40-hour workweek and may involve work at odd hours. Since caseworkers, in particular, have so many people relying on them for daily survival, the work is high stress and staff may begin to feel burnt-out over time. Volunteers at the GAA in Oakland are typically college students fulfilling community service requirements, or people who are taking a break from work or looking for work, so their assistance is often temporary. Recent studies show “one particular challenge facing organizations dependent on the services of volunteers, particularly the sustained involvement of volunteers over extended periods of time, is the fact that volunteerism, at least in North America, is changing and becoming increasingly episodic...people often volunteer for short periods of time and then move onto something else” (Snyder and Omoto 2008:23). With frequent staff transitions, the nature of operations, services, and organizational culture are bound to change as well. While my previous experience provided me with background knowledge about the organization and its services, I knew it would be problematic to make assumptions about where the GAA is today. It was equally important to learn about the current GAA clients and their experience with resettlement.

I approached the research in three steps. First, I conducted exploratory research to identify service barriers, information gaps, and unmet needs. Second, upon identifying

these issues, I conducted further research to identify plausible causes for such disconnects and obstacles. Third, I designed an appropriate intervention to address these problems, augmenting the services that were already being provided. In conceptualizing data analysis, I wanted to understand the microlevel issues that entangle the daily interactions between refugees and service providers, as well as the macrolevel forces that reveal how funding and policy shape the services that facilitate and constrain the resettlement process. Using a political economy approach allowed me to explore service encounters within the physical environment of Oakland, and in relation to overarching local and global, political and capitalist processes.

In order to “understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures” (Nader 1972:284) it was imperative to study up, looking at the realm of resettlement policy, and how that policy is put into practice at the GAA. Yet, practices don’t occur independent of human interaction. They are carried out and mediated by individuals and groups. To gain a more complex understanding of how stakeholders negotiate and interpret organizational processes I took a “vertical slice” approach, applying “the network model vertically rather than horizontally” (Nader 1980: 38). In this case, I chose to consult with individuals at various levels of the GAA hierarchy who provide and/or receive resettlement services. Refugee resettlement is carried out by actors in a hierarchy of power where relevant stakeholders – staff, volunteers, and clients – possess varying levels of control in shaping services, framing needs, and producing outcomes. With the vertical slice approach, I was able to understand how stakeholders conceptualized agency and control in their role and in the

roles of others during service encounters. Without the vertical slice approach, I may have overlooked the centrality of volunteers to GAA service encounters.

Data collection for this project took place between August 2012 and March 2013, and implementation of the intervention occurred between January and March 2013. I used open-ended ethnographic methods to identify what was happening within the organization during client-agency encounters, as well as how and why these dynamics were occurring. Following IRB approval, I conducted participant observation during my regularly scheduled volunteer hours, and over several additional days, during which I chose to visit the office solely for observational and interviewing purposes. I shadowed specific volunteers and staff members who served recently resettled refugees while they carried out tasks and provided services. Observations were often unstructured, and included informal conversation with staff, volunteers and clients. The most useful and insightful data stemmed from informal conversations about the nature of services, how duties were carried out, varying perceptions of client and volunteer needs, and the personal experiences of staff, volunteers and clients within various GAA-related interactions.

I conducted interviews primarily with staff and volunteers, and used different interview protocols for each group as a guide to lead my questions. Some interviewees overlapped among participant categories, in which case I used each protocol that was applicable. For example, some volunteers and staff were also former clients, and several staff started at the GAA as volunteers. Interviews lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. In total, eight formal interviews were conducted. Five of them were audio recorded and the other three were not. Before I began my research I expected to conduct

more interviews, but a smaller number of interviews turned out to be sufficient given the direction the data led me in, and the extent of exposure I had to the interviewees through participant observation.

In looking at services and practices, it was more informative to ask staff, volunteers and clients questions in the moment. Questions asked in context during observation allowed for more detailed reflection in participant responses and engagement. Participant responses from interviews often seemed brief and vague in comparison. During data analysis, it was clear the interview data was far less informative than the preliminary conversations I had with the participants in the months leading up to their interviews. While much of the interview data was repetitious, it was significant because it confirmed the validity of the data from my fieldnotes. Generally, interviewees seemed far more comfortable speaking openly in a more informal setting than during their interviews, even though they were aware I was taking notes and that their identities would be kept confidential, no matter the data collection technique. Several of the interviews did inspire follow-up questions in which case each interviewee was happy to oblige. However, it was most crucial to check in with staff, volunteers and clients regarding issues or questions as they arose during my ongoing participant observation.

Throughout the course of the research, during participant observation, I asked staff and volunteers to help me create maps of important services locations, as well as GAA services and practices. During my time with clients in the field, I asked them to identify places in Oakland that were important to them, as well as places they wanted to learn more about. I also inquired about which services and resources they felt were valuable or would be valuable if they had access to them. Since I was providing services

to clients as a volunteer at the time, I made sure to keep track of client and volunteer needs, reporting them back to both the caseworker and the site supervisor. Providing staff with feedback led to productive conversations and informed preliminary research as well as the intervention. As I designed and implemented the intervention, I reviewed my progress with staff and volunteers, asking for relevant feedback each step of the way in the development of the final product.

In approaching this project, I identified three categories of potential research participants at the GAA: staff, volunteers, and clients. Throughout the research period there were fourteen employees at the GAA Oakland office, five of whom provided resettlement related services. Staff ranged in age from their mid-twenties to fifties, and seven of them were immigrants to the United States. One of the immigrants was a refugee from the Balkans who was resettled in the Bay Area by the GAA, and another received asylee status upon arrival in the country after fleeing Eritrea.

The majority of volunteers throughout this period were American-born college students in their twenties. However, at least six of the volunteers with whom I worked most closely, and who contributed significantly to my data were immigrants. Two of them were refugees resettled by the GAA in Oakland over the past five years. Two others were interns from South Korea whose unfamiliarity with American systems was useful for identifying unquestioned assumptions about organizational processes and services, particularly when much resettlement work involves educating foreign clients about how those systems work. For example, while filling out a CalWORKS form to request cash assistance from Alameda County Social Services for a client, one of them asked me,

“What is a county?” Until that moment I hadn’t considered that most of our clients probably don’t know what county they live in.

The client population included recently resettled refugees from Burma, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea, as well as some of their family members and friends who were also resettled by the GAA or other resettlement agencies, but have been in Oakland for a longer period of time. Although I included client interviews in my preliminary research design, I chose not to conduct any formal interviews with recently resettled refugees beyond those who were also volunteers. Due to the abundance of client contributions in the participant observation data, formal interviews were unnecessary. Given the language barrier and the lack of context in a formal interview setting, inquiring with clients about their service experiences during service delivery was preferred.

THE GAA OAKLAND TODAY

An Organizational Approach

I began volunteering back at the GAA as a casework assistant in July of 2012, and received my Institutional Review Board approval the following month, at which point I informed Nicole, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, and other staff and volunteers that I was going to begin “official research” at the organization. The first step was to gain a proper understanding of the flow of the office in terms of staff and services, as well as daily practices and operational processes. When I asked the Development Manager for a copy of their organizational chart, she explained that they had undergone so many changes in recent times that they didn’t have a current one. In order to create a model of the organizational structure and create some working flowcharts (Appendix A, pages 5-6), I inquired of staff and volunteers over the first three months about the chain of command and hierarchy, the responsibilities of each staff member and volunteer, as well as the services they provide, an overview of the different departments, who reports to whom; and who the recipients of each program/service are. Using an “open-systems” approach (Harrison 2005), I considered the processes operating among organizational resources, services, technologies, the internal and external environments, and the dynamics among organizational actors and clients. Josiah C. Heyman (2004) notes that researchers of bureaucracy often focus solely on the internal characteristics of organizations, and fail to explore external factors, such as “the effects of their policies and work practices on clients” (488).

While the Global Aid Agency is an international NGO, I focused particularly on the organization in terms of its US resettlement program, and the bureaucratic elements that shed light on how policy shapes daily procedures in the internal and external environment. Since studies of bureaucratic systems contribute to various fields of knowledge, I wanted to ensure that I analyzed these systems beyond what was happening in the office on a daily basis. According to David Lewis, “bureaucracies generate social relationships and can only be understood if we move beyond simply looking at the internal structure to include the external relationship between controller and controlled, which help shape organizational processes and cultures” (1999:78).

Staff

The GAA Oakland office is staffed by employees who provide local programs based in Oakland, and administrators who oversee several Northern California regional offices. The arrangement of staff is best understood through a breakdown of departments in the areas of Northern California Regional administration, and Oakland-based services. A regional Executive Director and two Finance Administrators oversee the Oakland, San Jose, Sacramento and Turlock offices jointly. One Finance Administrator works in Oakland part-time, and the other works in Oakland full-time, overseeing general office management. The Oakland-based departments are resettlement, employment, immigration, and development. While the Executive Director supervises the development staff, a Site Supervisor oversees the resettlement, employment, and immigration departments.

The resettlement department is staffed by two Caseworkers who provide reception and placement services to incoming refugees. One Caseworker serves clients from Burma, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, while the other serves clients from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea. The employment department has one employee, the Employment Specialist, who manages the Matching Grant Employment Program for recently resettled refugees and asylees. The immigration department is staffed by a Senior Immigration Coordinator, two immigration Caseworkers, and a Civics Instructor. Together, the immigration team provides services for a broad range of refugees, asylees, and other immigrants, operating quite outside the realm of other services, which target recently resettled refugees. Often the clients who utilize immigration services have been in the United States for several months to many years. The development department consists of a Development Manager and the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, who focus on the development of funding, services, and volunteer programs for the Oakland office.

Each department manages a specific set of services or duties that constitute a program, and each program relies on unpaid interns and volunteers for support. Over my time at the GAA there were often over 25 volunteers contributing varying amounts of time, not including the family, friends and interpreters who also came in frequently to help GAA clients. Without interns and volunteers, the GAA would be unable to effectively serve their clients given the number of paid staff, and the number of clients who rely on their services. Looking at resettlement alone, two caseworkers resettle approximately 250 refugees each year, providing the full 90 days of R&P support services. Simply locating vacant, affordable housing in Oakland for 250 people in a year could be a full-time job. It seems understandable then, that caseworkers focus mainly on

case management, while relying on volunteers to provide the majority of the face-to-face services. Each employee relies on volunteer support to carry out the duties of their particular program, but there are also separate volunteer-based programs, such as Health Access, that report to a particular staff member but manage their own program. While this research project focused mainly on resettlement-related services, it was necessary to define the operations of each department to assess their relevance to the research (see Appendix A, page 7 for department descriptions).

Volunteers and Interns

In addition to mapping GAA staff and departments, it was necessary to develop an understanding of each volunteer program and where it fits into the organizational structure since volunteers are essential to the provision of agency-wide services (see Appendix A, page 7 for volunteer program descriptions). At the GAA, interns and volunteers are asked to provide a minimum commitment of three months. Volunteers are asked to pledge one day (or one half day) of support per week, whereas interns are asked to commit to working at least three days per week. Due to changes in volunteers' employment status (many volunteers came to the GAA during bouts of unemployment) and school demands, volunteer transitions occurred regularly.

There were also several significant staff transitions throughout the course of this project that seemed to exacerbate the challenges volunteers were facing in terms of learning how to carry out duties and how to determine client needs. At the outset of my research, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator left for maternity leave, as did one of the

Immigration Caseworkers (ironically, the other Immigration Caseworker was also pregnant, and luckily, the first Caseworker to go on maternity leave was able to come back the week after the second Caseworker left for maternity leave). These transitions often meant that overloaded staff and volunteers were expected to take on the additional work. Luckily, the agency was able to find a dedicated student intern to fill in for the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, since she had been the sole overseer of volunteer recruitment. In December of 2012 during the design phase of my project, the full-time Finance/Office Administrator left for a job in Egypt. The resettlement Caseworker who served Middle Eastern and African clients was hired to fill that position, but due to the quick staff turnover required and delays in filling her casework position, she ended up working both jobs simultaneously for a month, relying on her intern to take over the majority of the casework.

During this same period, GAA Headquarters announced that it would conduct an internal audit of the GAA Oakland's programs for refugees, focusing on the resettlement and employment departments, as well as finance. The audit was to be conducted in February of 2013, which again added to the stress and workload of staff, who then turned to volunteers to assist in preparing client documentation for monitoring. This process delayed the implementation of my intervention on an agency-wide level, but I was able to provide acute support to the resettlement department in the meantime, where simultaneous staff, volunteer and intern transitions were occurring.

Due to the small size of the office, I worked in close quarters with staff and volunteers in all departments, but I remained focused on those who worked in the resettlement department. In the fall of 2012, two young women from South Korea came

to intern for the resettlement program, working very closely with their respective caseworkers four days a week. The other resettlement volunteers, who committed one to two days per week, had been at the GAA for quite some time and remained there throughout the period of this project. In February 2013, the interns from South Korea who had served at the GAA for six months returned home, and the Volunteer Coordinator Intern (filling in for the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator who was out on maternity leave) struggled to find new interns who could start before the departure of the previous interns. Luckily, one incoming resettlement intern was able to start in January, giving her a week of overlap with a previous intern who provided some basic training before the arrival of the new resettlement Caseworker, with whom she would work. However, both the new Caseworker and the resettlement intern (who would serve the Middle Eastern and African clients) had to learn how to do their jobs without the supervision of the previous Caseworker, who at this point was concentrating all of her efforts on her new administrative position, while simultaneously closing all of her former cases. This meant that it was up to the other resettlement Caseworker to provide most of the casework training to the new Caseworker, and two new resettlement interns, while concurrently resettling refugees, and preparing all of her client files for the audit.

While the transitions among agency staff and volunteers produced a chaotic environment, many of the everyday challenges were rooted in the scarcity of agency resources. When it comes to reception and placement services, and the corresponding employment program, funding is extremely limited due to policy constraints, and the insufficient funding leads to the reliance on volunteer support. This dynamic expands far beyond the GAA, and is common to most, if not all resettlement agencies in the US that

are contracted by the US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (US GAO 2012). Although development staff and the Executive Director were consistently working to expand funding and programs, limited financial resources are a common problem for resettlement agencies. Technology needs similarly exceeded the availability of resources and affected service efficiency. On busy days it was not uncommon for volunteers to take turns using computers and the copy machine to get their work done. Computer systems were outdated and consistent server connection problems meant that some tasks took much longer than they could have.

Since staff were often busy with clients or were in the field setting up apartments and picking up clients at the airport, volunteers had a hard time figuring out how to address these technological problems, even though the GAA has its own help desk to provide support in this area. It turned out most volunteers were unaware the help desk existed. One day I was assisting a new casework intern who explained she had been trying to print from her computer for two weeks without success and had just accepted that it wasn't possible. She hadn't known whom to turn to for help. I was able to solve the problem for her in a matter of minutes since I had experienced the same problem so many times. For two weeks she had been creating documents, emailing them to herself, and waiting for the availability of another computer just to print her work. There were also problems connecting to the client database, which resulted in delays, and even panic when volunteers had to access client information quickly. With the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator out, and her volunteer intern working only part-time, finding available support from staff or someone with enough familiarity to solve basic problems was a challenge. The environment in the office was also hectic at times due to the extent of

client needs. Even though there was often a volunteer present simply to greet clients at the office and answer the phone to direct client calls to the appropriate staff member (a task all volunteers were expected to assist with), the volume of clients exceeded the availability of volunteers and staff who could help during busy hours.

For resettlement staff and volunteers, the environment outside the office was particularly significant to their work. Volunteers often conducted a great deal of their work outside of the office, accompanying clients to appointments at Social Security, Social Services, the bank, or the health center, and enrolling children in school. Depending on the external organization or institution, encounters may be highly accommodating to client needs, in the case of International High School, for example, where administrators regularly work with refugee students and their families. However, the most common encounters for resettlement workers, and the first encounters for clients (with external agencies) are with local social service organizations that serve a broad array of clients from the general Oakland population. Social Services in particular could be very busy, very loud, and their staff were rarely patient or accommodating to GAA clients who require a higher level of assistance due to language barriers and inexperience with American bureaucracies. Even though volunteers provided assistance through this process and advocated by their client's side, services environments were often difficult even for them to navigate, resulting in inefficiency and confusion.

In Fall 2012, I experienced two such incidents. One day I took a client to pick up his EBT (food stamps) card after I had personally spoken with his social worker, who confirmed the card was at Social Services waiting for him. We waited an hour in line for a number, and another hour to be called up to the window for help. The intake specialist

who assisted us was irritable and impatient. She took one look for the card and told us it wasn't there. I asked her nicely to look again, and she said she already did. I pleaded with her to take another look, and when she couldn't find it the second time she told us we had to call the social worker again and explained there was nothing more she could do. The client had been waiting weeks for his card, and had a young son and a pregnant wife to feed at home. I apologized to him, and sent him home. When I got back to the office, I called the Social Worker and left her a message to explain what had happened. She told me the card should have been there, and when I asked her if she could look she told me she didn't have any time, but she would find someone to check and call me back. After two more visits to Social Services with other volunteers, the client finally picked up his card a week later. The card didn't work, and the cycle started all over again.

During another trip to Social Services with a different client, I ran into a new volunteer who had brought a family to meet their social worker. When he told me why they were at Social Services I realized right away that they had been waiting in the wrong part of the building. They were expecting the worker to come call their name in the intake area, but when this didn't happen, they got in the long line to speak to someone at the information desk for help. By this point they had already missed their appointment and had to reschedule for another day. These types of incidents were common, especially for new volunteers who had to learn these systems themselves since the staff had so little time to explain the more intricate details of how to best navigate Social Services and similar agencies. Additional players in the external environment during the R&P period included building managers and landlords, schools, employers and health providers.

Clients

Clients at the GAA are resettled from many countries and there is great diversity within each citizenship-based population. Burmese clients, for example, vary greatly in terms of culture, language, religion, and life experience. Some GAA clients have received advanced degrees abroad, while others have never attended school. Some speak English fluently, and some don't know how to read or write in their own native language, much less speak more than a couple words in English. Some clients have endured extreme trauma, suffering from acute PTSD and other mental health issues, while others suffer less from trauma associated with violence and torture, but nonetheless suffer from severe stress, anxiety and/or depression due to separation from home, family, and community. Addressing the negative effects of such loss is a high priority when it comes to resettlement. Additionally, some clients were born and raised in refugee camps (in a second country), while others spent most of their lives in their native countries or lived as undocumented immigrants in second countries.

Some clients arrive in Oakland alone, having been separated from friends and family. Others are able to resettle with their family intact, and may even be able to reconnect with immediate or extended family in the US. Clients (individuals or families) who have no family or friends in the US are referred to as "Free Cases." For free cases the resettlement agency will have to provide the full range of resettlement services and those clients will be going through this process on their own. If clients have friends or family established in the US, the resettlement agency will contact them to see if they can

provide assistance and guidance to those clients. If so, that friend or family member is referred to as the “US Tie,” or “anchor.” US Ties provide varying levels of aid, from housing and finance, to interpretation and culturally relevant orientation support. Clients with free cases have much more difficulty through the resettlement transition because they have to learn how to live in the United States virtually on their own, especially if there is no established ethnic community in the area, or if they are linguistically isolated. Although the resettlement process varies greatly for each client, I explored the common integration advantages and barriers (i.e. English language acquisition, familiarity with education and employment systems in the US, and so on) of client population based on country of origin (see Appendix A, page 9 for descriptions of client populations).

Working with clients directly helped me understand how clients themselves perceived GAA services and support, how they felt about the resettlement process, and how they chose to engage with service providers. While all refugees are provided with an orientation to life in the United States before their arrival, they are often unaware of what their new environment will really be like. The pre-departure orientation covers what they should know in general terms about culture and society in the US and what will be expected of them after they arrive. The US Refugee Admissions Program and subsequent policies heavily stress the need to become financially self-sufficient (Brick et al. 2010; Erickson 2012; Jeung et al. 2011; Keles 2008; Nawyn 2010; Ong 2003) and this is made explicit in the pre-migration orientation. However, not everyone comes prepared or able to work. While refugees know they will be expected to find work if they are considered employable, they do not necessarily know what that process entails. Working-age adult clients who had some English language skills, especially young men

who arrived on their own, were often very eager to begin job searching and were concerned about relying on financial support through social services. For those with very limited English, especially the Burmese, it was understandably difficult to get an idea of what they expected or wanted due to the language barrier. Staff who screened clients for the employment program often had to find translators to adequately communicate these types of questions and concerns.

Addressing self-sufficiency with families (especially extended families), could be far more challenging. Staff often had to figure out who may be able to find a job, and how to secure enough cash assistance for the remaining family members, since the clients often only found low-paying and/or part-time jobs. For families with two parents and many small children, it was difficult to figure out how they could become self-sufficient. If the mother expected to stay home to care for small children, and the father was able only to find a “survival job,” they would have a very hard time getting by, and would likely need to rely on cash assistance through social services to supplement that income. Due to the recession, cash assistance support in Alameda County was very low, and if the family did report some level of income, the cash assistance may be drastically reduced. This was also a problem for multi-generational families where working age parents had both children and the elderly to care for.

On a case-by-case basis, a family may have sufficient options to bring in enough money from social services or social security (in the case of the elderly or disabled) that financial sustainability would be feasible. However, depending on the age of children and grandparents, a family may find itself in the opposite position with grandparents not yet old enough for SSI, or teenagers who want to finish high school but are technically

adults. For example, in one extended family I worked with, two of the four children wanted to finish high school, but they were old enough to be considered adults by Social Services, and were therefore ineligible to receive support unless they went through mandatory employment training, which they could only do if they dropped out of high school. They lived with their parents who had serious medical problems but they were ten years too young to be eligible for mandatory Social Security Income. The parents were able to apply for Social Security Disability Income, but it often took many months to get approval, if they were to be approved at all. Until they were approved, it was hard to secure enough services so that they could pay their bills, even though the parents were receiving Refugee Cash Assistance and their two male sons had secured jobs at Wal-Mart and Chipotle, respectively. Particularly where there were significant health and mental health problems, helping a family become self-sufficient before they were cutoff from GAA support was a harrowing challenge that left caseworkers and volunteers scrambling.

While the GAA office could be very slow in terms of client traffic, resettlement staff often had busy periods where several families or individuals would arrive together. This often resulted in long hours for the caseworker who had to find housing, buy all the supplies for each family, set-up their apartments, figure out which services to apply for (for each case), arrange for interpreters, pick the families up at the airport, take them to their homes, and so on. This also put stress on the human resources available, meaning longer waits for clients and decreased assistance in attending to their immediate needs. Among resettlement agencies, this is generally considered the norm and the nature of the work, but it can be very draining on staff and their volunteers. Between the short period of GAA support, after which clients have to be self-sufficient to survive, and the client

caseloads, it was often difficult for resettlement staff and volunteers to address client needs beyond ensuring that everyone had what they needed to survive. This is where other programs, such as Employment, Mental Health and Health Access came into the picture to supplement the R&P services.

While accessing social services is imperative for GAA clients during their initial weeks in Oakland, there are other organizations in the external environment that have the potential to provide clients with longer term or more specialized support services.

Oakland is home to an array of organizations that specifically serve refugee populations.

Refugee Transitions provides ESL, tutoring, and after school support for kids. Asian Community Mental Health Services staff have a wealth of experience serving refugee

clients from various countries. There is also the East Bay Refugee Forum, a regional consortium of representatives from local refugee support agencies, including the GAA.

The EBRF works to enhance and expand collaboration among agencies, to address service gaps, and to better connect clients to other agencies that can provide support to them. For example, Lao Family Community Development provides refugee employment assistance, which can be of help to GAA clients who were unable to find a job during the timeframe of their R&P and Matching Grant services, or for those who lost a job after GAA support ended and need help finding a new one.

SUPPLEMENTING RECEPTION AND PLACEMENT SERVICES

In her 2010 study of refugee resettlement agencies, Stephanie J. Nawyn explored resettlement programs through a framework of “institutional opportunity structures” where different types of organizations (i.e. voluntary agencies, mutual assistance associations, and support agencies) either constrained or facilitated refugee client autonomy. Some organizations “reproduce the gender and racial/ethnic subordination embedded in refugee welfare policy” (Nawyn 2010:149) by doing little beyond enrolling clients in state welfare programs and pushing clients into low-skilled, low-paying jobs where they linger in economic hardship. Other organizations provide their clients with advocacy and supplemental support programs (such as cultural activities, ESL, and additional job training) that give them the skills and confidence they need to become self-sufficient in the long run, and challenge their own structural marginalization (Nawyn 2010:149). Since the goal of these organizations is to support refugees by maximizing their ability to integrate successfully into American society, it is unlikely they intend to economically subordinate their clients, however, the recreation of social inequality (to varying degrees) is a circumstance of poorly enacted welfare policy and lack of financial support that impedes resettlement services. Nawyn points out R&P services are simply inadequate, yet because these NGOs are responsible for ensuring their clients become financially self-sufficient by the time services end, they encourage their clients to take any job they can find as soon as possible.

Nawyn’s findings are consistent with my observations at the GAA, where clients are encouraged to locate “survival jobs” as soon as possible because, on the one hand,

those who are ineligible for Refugee Cash Assistance through Social Services can end up homeless without a job, and because, on the other hand, Refugee Cash Assistance is unlikely to cover their monthly rent⁴. However, survival jobs also often prevent refugees from becoming economically stable because they are low paying, low skilled, and may be only part-time. Refugees often have to find more than one job to pay their rents, leaving them little time and resources to pursue education down the line. At the same time, the GAA in Oakland, unlike some other resettlement organizations, does offer the types of supplemental programming that Nawyn sees as boosting social mobility for refugees. In addition to programs in health, mental health, and farming, the GAA also connects employed clients to scholarships that will fund educational programs to boost their professional skill sets and, eventually, their incomes. Nawyn also found that resettlement agencies that provide services to celebrate refugees' traditional cultures and educate the public about refugee traditions and circumstances were those that supported more positive outcomes for their clients. In addition to their involvement with the East Bay Refugee Forum, the GAA holds many annual events to bring refugees and non-refugees in the community together, to bridge communication and celebrate refugee and American traditions. Although they have been very successful in offering alternative programs and in advocating for their clients throughout the county, locating funding and volunteer labor to maintain such programs is the bigger challenge.

⁴ Refugees are eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance through Social Services for 8 months following arrival in the US. After that point, they may apply for General Assistance, which they are expected to pay back. Monthly RCA payments for an individual are only \$317, whereas Matching Grant cash assistance through the GAA is \$495. However, the MG cash assistance is only offered for up to 4 months.

GAA Oakland staff understand that the only way to provide sufficient resettlement services and ensure long-term stability for clients is to locate other sources of funding and create programs above and beyond what is provided through the Reception and Placement and Matching Grant programs. Currently, volunteers and interns are working on expanding the types of services they can provide in the areas of health, mental health, and financial literacy support. The Executive Director has been working on developing the “New Roots” microenterprise program so that clients can farm for self-sufficiency and sell their products. Targeting those clients who have no employment history and/or very limited English, the organization is going to launch a Culinary Class that will provide interested clients with kitchen and restaurant training, after which they will receive a California Food Handlers Certificate. The development staff is often working on grant applications for funding current and new programs. The Site Supervisor has been working with Alameda County to create a new program (funded by Alameda County) that will better connect refugee clients to Social Service employment programs that have historically been inaccessible to them. This new grant will provide the GAA with funding for a new staff position. In addition to ensuring that GAA clients have access to existing employment training and opportunities throughout Alameda County, the new Employment and Career Development Coordinator will work with a consortium of non-profit organizations that serve refugees in order to connect current GAA clients to other support agencies directly.

While the literature on refugee resettlement often focuses on problematic power differentials between resettlement workers and refugees, or the dynamics of such services that situate refugees in a racialized and isolated underclass – all of which are true – what

often goes unmentioned is the dire urgency that resettlement workers face on a daily basis while trying to ensure their clients simply have the means to survive. Where I thought I might find paternalism or some semblance of the “white savior complex,” I really found overwhelmed yet determined people who were preoccupied with making sure that each person who arrived in Oakland had what she or he needed to survive. Due to varying client needs and circumstances, resettlement workers have to be flexible and focused. In observing and doing resettlement work throughout this project, I have come to the conclusion that the dynamics of this work can be best compared to Emergency Room triage. It is nearly impossible to get beyond a frantic sense of “who needs what and how can we get it for them?” From the moment a resettlement caseworker receives an arrival notice for a new client she focuses her time and energy on making sure that family or individual simply has the basics because she really has no time or resources beyond that.

While I’ve heard similar accounts of resettlement dynamics from volunteers and staff who worked at other offices, there is something about the current environment in Oakland that really exacerbates this sense of urgency. Resettlement services in Oakland are funded by the same amount of R&P support, \$1,850 (US GAO 2012), as resettlement services at every agency that conducts resettlement in the country. But when clients arrive in Oakland, they are arriving in a city that has a rapidly increasing cost of living, a high unemployment rate, Social Services funding that has been severely cut since the recession and has yet to recover, as well as basic low-income, inner city neighborhood problems (such as a high crime rate). Following the dwindling of the successful Family Mentor program at the GAA (due to staff transitions) since 2009, resettlement workers in Oakland try their best to help clients adjust to these barriers, but they have little, if any,

time to introduce their clients to the benefits of living in Oakland: access to familiar foods and products, a diverse environment with many immigrants, familiar religious institutions, low-cost activities for kids and families, an increased chance of connecting with people of the same ethnic and linguistic group, and a wealth of organizations that provide assistance to refugees and immigrants.

IDENTIFYING SERVICE GAPS AND INFORMATION BARRIERS

Identifying Common Challenges for Volunteers: Resettlement

Upon my return to the GAA, providing support as a volunteer enabled me to learn far more about the current state of the organization and resettlement casework than if I had simply conducted interviews and participant observation. I became engaged in the everyday processes of the GAA, learning about the work as I carried it out and asking pertinent questions as they arose, rather than exploring them in hindsight through interviews. Many aspects of the organization of GAA staff and volunteers had changed since 2009, and due to changes in Department of Homeland Security clearances, fewer refugees were arriving in Oakland.

While the GAA previously had a full-time AmeriCorps Volunteer Coordinator position that entailed supervising and training volunteers on a full-time basis, the new Volunteer and Intern Coordinator was heavily engaged in development and provided little oversight for volunteers aside from maintaining the volunteer schedule and providing an initial office orientation. Furthermore, staff had come to the decision that it would be more efficient if each volunteer was trained by and worked under the direct supervision of a particular staff member in the department the volunteer chose to serve. Each resettlement volunteer or intern was now assigned to work with a Caseworker, assisting that person only with his or her cases. The same was true for employment volunteers who now worked solely under the Employment Specialist, for the Health Access Team who reported to the Site Supervisor, and so on, for each volunteer program. While volunteers formerly had contact with any staff member or volunteer relevant to their daily

tasks, volunteers were now more segregated and specialized, organized according to their particular program and assigned supervisor. This new system enhanced the degree of support that each staff member received from their dedicated volunteers, but it also created a rift between programs, decreasing the communication among departments and service providers. This meant that most volunteers were unaware of the services and programs of other departments, and this led to misinformation when it came to answering phones, telling clients about GAA services, and directing clients to the right employee. In an office where volunteers are often asked to fill in for absent volunteers or to assist staff members they don't usually help, this left them unprepared to do so.

On my first day back, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator showed me around the office, introduced me to the staff, and then turned me over to my assigned caseworker, Clare, who resettled clients from Burma, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. I explained that I had done resettlement casework several years earlier, and worked closely with refugees from each of these places. Due to my previous time at the GAA, and subsequent work experience in social services, she asked me to go ahead and jump in where I could. She was short on volunteers that day and needed assistance for clients who arrived the night before. The new arrivals needed to apply for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal at Social Services, social security cards at Social Security, and they had to cash their first R&P check. She also had several clients and families waiting for her in the reception area who needed her assistance with a variety of matters, from bills and mail, to questions about housing and school. Like my earlier time at the GAA, it was common that caseworkers had an overwhelming number of clients to accommodate each day, and this confirmed the need for volunteers. Since Clare had to stay in the office to assist clients there, she asked

me to help the new arrivals submit their applications and cash their check to get pocket money for food. She handed me the completed applications, made sure I knew where I was going, introduced me to the multigenerational Bhutanese family, gave them their check, and sent us out the door. Even though I had done this work before, it always felt somewhat awkward to escort an entire family to sign up for services they knew nothing about, and yet it was the only way to make sure they would have money for food and healthcare coverage. It was a necessary measure to make sure each arrival would have what they'd need to survive.

The large family had arrived late the night before following a 20+ hour journey from a refugee camp in Nepal to Oakland. The grandparents and parents spoke little to no English, but their grandkids spoke enough for to carry on a simple conversation, even though they had a difficult time understanding me. Everyone looked tired, and the grandparents walked slowly. I asked the younger adults if walking was comfortable for their grandparents, and they assured me they would be okay. From the GAA office to Social Security, then to Social Services, then to the bank, and back to the GAA took a little over 2 miles walking, but included lengthy waits in between each stretch. The waiting time was often more tiring than the walking, but I tried my best to talk to the family while we waited at each place to keep them informed about what we were doing and to answer any questions they had. For me, it was always important to explain what we were applying for and why. I explained that the caseworkers tended to be very busy, so any time that family was in the presence of a volunteer or waiting for an appointment, they should feel free to ask basic questions about life in the US. Since the older adults didn't understand me, I asked the grandchildren (ages 16 to 20) to translate the logistical

information to their parents and grandparents, and I wrote it down for them: the Social Security cards would arrive in three to four weeks and are the most important type of ID in the U.S; the Social Services application was for free healthcare so they could go to the doctor and for money to buy food; and when we cashed their check we signed the family up for a checking account so they could keep their money safe at the bank.

Six hours later we finished those three errands, and returned to the office. The family was tired and hungry. Clare asked me to give them a “bus orientation” and take them home. She had picked them up that morning in the GAA van and brought them to the office, so this was their first trip on the bus. I knew they would need to come back to the GAA in a couple of days, and with the maze of one way streets in downtown Oakland, I decided to show them where to get off the bus for their return to the GAA the following week, and how to walk to the GAA from that bus stop. Then we walked to another bus stop a block away to wait for the bus that would take them home. I showed them how to use their bus tickets, and told them they could ask any bus driver to help them find their stop, since they just moved to the city. I got on the bus with them to make sure they made it all the way home, and showed them which street signs to look for so they could keep track of where they were. I explained how to use the “next stop” buttons to signal when their bus stop was coming, and I tried to point out some useful landmarks as we exited the bus. I thought back to my first trip on AC Transit in Oakland with clients in 2009. At that time, it had been several years since I had taken the bus in Oakland, and I was unfamiliar with the neighborhood we were traveling to. Since I didn’t want to give the clients the wrong information, I actually asked the bus driver to show us collectively how to do all of these things. Two years later, I was more

comfortable giving a “bus orientation” thanks to all of the bus riding I had done with GAA clients before. On the walk to their new house, I showed the family where to wait for the bus to get back to the GAA, and asked them if they had any questions about their new apartment, how to get back to the GAA for next time, or about anything else we had done that day. The oldest son explained that they really just needed to eat and go to sleep, but he knew to call Clare if they had any questions. I reminded him that Clare would be stopping by in a couple of hours to make sure they had everything they needed and to give them an apartment orientation.

By the time I got back to the GAA it was already 4:00pm, the time when volunteers leave for the day. I checked in with Clare, who was still busy with clients. I recounted how I conducted the bus orientation, since she hadn’t given me instructions about how to do this and I wanted to make sure I didn’t miss anything. She thanked me profusely and explained that it was such a relief that I knew how to do these things. She said that most days she had an intern to help her with client coordination, but not on Wednesdays, so it was a relief to have someone there. I asked how many volunteers she had to help her each day, and she explained that each caseworker usually had one or two, but that not all of the volunteers came regularly. I was surprised because I knew in years past there were often up to six volunteers in the office on a daily basis just to assist with casework, whether in the field or with casefiles and administrative work. She explained that resettlement work with interns was often more efficient because they had greater familiarity with the clients and required less instruction about what had to be done for each case.

An additional change at the GAA since 2009 was the creation of official intern positions that were posted to the GAA website. The Volunteer and Intern Coordinator worked on recruiting unpaid interns for each staff member or program. The interns were able to provide more consistent direct support by devoting three or four days a week to the GAA, and consequently learned more about the work in a shorter amount of time. By committing so much time to one staff member's caseload, they were also more familiar with case progress and particular client needs. By comparison, it seemed logical that interns would be able to provide more adequate assistance than volunteers who came in only once or twice a week. Interns could take over a significant portion of a staff member's workload and carry out that work independently in a way that volunteers who were less committed could not. When a staff transition occurred in December 2012, the caseworker that took on the vacant administrative position also had to continue serving her resettlement clients through January until her replacement caseworker arrived. Because her casework intern, Mina, had learned so much from shadowing her, the intern was actually able to step in and carry out much of her resettlement casework independently. Some of the clients actually thought Mina was their caseworker.

This new arrangement was not perfect, however, and when an intern upon whom staff came to rely left the organization after three to six months, the replacement (if there was one) would require full training. The caseworker, who now had extremely limited time because she had just lost a significant amount of support due to the departure of her intern, would then be expected to train the new intern. Clearly, it was most desirable to find a replacement intern who could be trained by the former intern before his or her departure, but this was rarely the case. Finding decent candidates who were able to work

three to four days a week for several months without pay was difficult and often limited the applicant pool to students. If there was a delay in finding interns, the intern-less staff member could end up overloaded with work, with little support depending on how many other volunteers they had at their disposal. When a new intern was located, the training process could be slow and hectic depending on the current client caseload. Under the earlier arrangement, the dedicated volunteer coordinator would provide all the training so that volunteers only required limited, if any, guidance from the busy caseworkers. While this new system was more efficient, it also had the potential to put great stress on resettlement caseworkers who had to provide for their clients, first and foremost. Even though I had volunteered in the past, I realized there were many things I needed training to learn how to do. While Clare was my go-to person, she was often busy seeing clients back-to-back or out of the office setting up apartments and picking up new arrivals. This often led to a delay in my ability to find answers to my questions, however the next best option was to turn to a resettlement intern for help.

Over the ensuing weeks I provided Clare with support in a variety of areas: pre-arrival planning; apartment set-up, scheduling health screenings; creating casefiles and maintaining casenotes to indicate services rendered; completing clients' applications for social services; assistance with school enrollment; and accompanying clients in the field. Since caseworkers had their own volunteers to work with, they were able to dictate who assisted with what, and divvy up the training so that different volunteers would become particularly adept at certain types of work. I was often asked to work with clients in the field, while Clare's other volunteer (on the days I was in) worked mainly on maintaining casefiles and doing paperwork. When that volunteer left, we didn't have a replacement,

so Clare asked me try to work on what I could. Although I became somewhat comfortable with interrupting Clare to ask her questions because I didn't want to do anything wrong, I figured out how to carry out many of these tasks on my own, even though it was a cumbersome learning process and I made many mistakes that I had to go back and fix. About a month into my time at the GAA, the two interns from South Korea came on board. Each one was dedicated to one of the caseworkers. Sun was assigned to work with Clare, and since we were in the middle of the "busy season" Clare asked me to assist with her training. While most GAA volunteers are young college students who may not be familiar with social work, refugee resettlement, or the Oakland environment, the logic of local social services was particularly unfamiliar for Sun. Since resettlement work was often busy and hectic, the amount of time caseworkers had to provide new interns and volunteers with training was always minimal. I was happy help train Sun and was able to give her more thorough instructions than caseworkers have time for. I also had her shadow me in the field when we weren't too busy, so she was prepared to take clients out of the office in advance.

In terms of the GAA services provided for recently resettled refugees, such as resettlement, employment and health, volunteers often had far more contact with clients than the staff did. For this reason, I realized that my research would depend a great deal on learning more about the volunteers. Once I received my IRB approval and began to take field notes each day, I spent as much time as possible talking to volunteers about the services they provided and their encounters with staff and clients. Even during my earlier time at the GAA it was clear that no matter what department you served as a volunteer, a lot of the work, especially in the field, is work that you learn as you do it.

While some of the work was intuitive, much of it was not, and I began to talk to volunteers about training. Most volunteers felt that they had not received the training they really needed to carry out their duties when they began as volunteers, and that they had to learn over time on their own. Volunteers reported guessing as they went, learning by trying, sometimes getting it right, and sometimes making mistakes, but ultimately learning over time. Studies that explore the consequences of services provided to refugees by untrained volunteers reveal that “a reliance on the goodwill of volunteers with few accountability standards and almost no training does little to challenge deeply ingrained attitudes about race, class, gender, culture and that state” (Erickson 2012:174). While these concerns certainly need to be addressed, so does the dilemma that a lack of training can leave volunteers unable to provide even the most basic services.

Agency-wide, GAA staff were busy and had so little free time that volunteers reported feeling sheepish about approaching them for help. If staff were out of the office, it was assumed that guessing was the only way to learn. For example, when filling out applications for Medi-Cal and Food Stamps, volunteers had guides they would use to help them fill in the answers, but sometimes the suggested responses weren't applicable and there was confusion. In these cases, volunteers would generally ask whoever was available to help, but caseworkers were the only ones who really knew the system in all of its complexity. Volunteer work that was done wrong would have to be corrected by the caseworker. If a volunteer dedicated a day to entering client casenotes when they weren't really sure how to do so, the caseworker would have to go back and re-do all of the work. While it was understood that volunteers were under-trained because staff did not have the time and resources to provide the level of instruction volunteers needed, there was a very

obvious inefficiency to the current standard. The staff, particularly the caseworkers, were often frustrated by this situation, but the bottom line was that their job was to do casework and that immediate client needs had priority over training volunteers, even if they had to go back later to fix volunteer mistakes and errors. Over time there was hope that volunteers would learn how to carry out their tasks correctly and efficiently.

An additional challenge for resettlement volunteers was that they weren't necessarily familiar with the logic behind the resettlement program, the timeline for carrying out tasks, or even the purpose of some of their duties. Without much context for what you're doing or instruction for how to do it, it's very easy to make mistakes or miss details. If you are a new volunteer and a caseworker asks you to carry out a task you've never done before, the intuitive response is, "how do you want me to do that?" My experience, however, was that when given a new task I would ask how to do something, I would receive brief verbal instructions, and then in carrying out that task other questions would arise and unless I could reach a caseworker at the office, there was no way of knowing if I was doing something correctly. I had to guess, and then check in with a caseworker later to see if I made the right decision. Other volunteers and interns shared this common experience, and it seemed that even though there was no way of predicting the nuances of each service encounter, many of the tasks that volunteers experienced confusion over did entail straightforward, standardized steps. While no amount of training was going to give you all of the answers, many of the tasks volunteers carried out were quite simple and consistent.

One day I was completing paperwork when a new resettlement volunteer returned to the office. She had just accompanied an older Iraqi woman to an application

appointment for Social Security Disability Income. Since she was new, she was unfamiliar with social security, had never heard of SSDI, and didn't really understand that in order to be eligible for financial assistance, applicants must demonstrate that they do not have the monetary or investment resources necessary to support themselves. During the interview, the social security employee asked the woman if she owned any property. The volunteer said no, but the woman looked up and said that she had owned a home in Iraq. The volunteer knew that, on the one hand, this wasn't exactly accurate in the sense that social security policy characterizes home ownership, and on the other hand, if it looked like this woman owned a house, that could mean she would be deemed ineligible. The volunteer didn't know what to tell the interviewer, and didn't yet have the vocabulary to explain to him, or the applicant, why she should not be considered a homeowner. When the volunteer explained the situation back at the GAA, the caseworker contacted social security to see if they could discuss the matter. Since the woman was a refugee, would not be returning home, and no longer had any access to this property, she should not be considered a homeowner. Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic red tape, the woman was denied SSDI, and she had to apply again to clear up the confusion.

Regarding these types of errors, an additional concern was that clients often caught on when a volunteer didn't really know what they were doing, or made a mistake. Another volunteer shared a story where the client she was assisting seemed to be more equipped to navigate social services than she was. She had misunderstood the social worker's instructions about what the client needed to do in order to follow up with an employment worker, and when the client informed her of her confusion, she felt embarrassed and was concerned that she could have obstructed the application process.

Not only were volunteers constantly in the process of learning how to do their work with limited guidance, but they were also learning how to communicate with clients. Volunteers were mainly young students from UC Berkeley, or other nearby colleges, who were living in socially liberal milieu. Many of them were very culturally competent, and had experience with diversity and/or immigration. Many of them were immigrants or children of immigrants. Only once did I overhear of a situation where a volunteer demonstrated the type of paternalism commonly reported in other accounts of refugee-related volunteerism (Erickson 2012). However, they still had to learn to communicate with clients from very different places, with very different experiences, and often with people who spoke little to no English. Reflecting on the bus orientation I gave during my first day back, I wondered how other volunteers decided what the appropriate level of communication was while out in the field with clients. It was expected that the volunteers try their best to communicate with the clients about what they are doing and why, but some volunteers reported feeling uneasy or unsure in this area.

At times volunteers felt concerned that clients didn't feel comfortable speaking English, so they limited their communication, and at other times volunteers would try to communicate a lot of information at once, and would accept a client's nodding as a sign of comprehension, only to find out later that the client did not understand or misunderstood. Miscommunication was very common, but so was a failure on the part of volunteers to communicate with clients because they were unsure or uncomfortable. Several new volunteers also reported that they weren't aware of what certain services were, even though they were helping clients apply for them. One day a new volunteer walked into the office and said, "I just took someone to apply for Food Stamps...what is

that?” This volunteer waited until after the trip to social services to ask this question, because she wasn’t able to find a caseworker or volunteer available to answer this question before she left with the client. In reality, it may have been preferable if she had known what Food Stamps actually were (i.e. Food Stamps do not come in the form of stamps), how clients use them, and how these services fit into the larger scope of client needs, so that she could have shared this information with her clients while they were applying for them.

Over my first month back at the GAA, there were several instances where I took clients to Social Services, and ran into other volunteers who were there waiting with their clients in silence. Given the language barrier, it was often hard to maintain conversations with clients during a long wait, especially if they expressed that they were uncomfortable with their English or would rather not talk. For those just arriving in the country, they are bombarded with information from the moment they arrive and can be understandably overwhelmed and in need of some quiet time to reflect. Volunteers are expected to be conscientious of that, but not to a point where they sit there as if the client is invisible. Furthermore, it was those instances of sitting with clients at Social Services or the DMV that could be the most opportune time for volunteers and clients to communicate with each other, and clarify questions, confusion or concerns. If I was with clients who didn’t speak English and we were waiting for a long time, I would practice vocabulary with them, or pull out a map to help them navigate and learn about Oakland. If they had kids, we would work on counting numbers, or learning colors.

At a certain point I sought out two volunteers who I noticed were rarely conversing with the clients they served. When I asked them how they felt about speaking

with clients, they each explained, in separate conversations, that they didn't know what to say to clients or how to approach them, especially since it was hard to tell how much was understood. They were unclear of what was expected of them when it came explaining to clients what they were doing when they were out in the field. Explaining what Food Stamps or Medi-Cal are to a client who doesn't speak English simply may not be possible. At the same time, the clients are expected to become self-sufficient and use these benefits, so they will have to learn about them. One volunteer explained that he had never really thought about it that way, and just assumed that the caseworker would take care of communication and teaching clients how to use their services. Based on conversations with the caseworkers, it seemed they expected volunteers to communicate this information to clients, and notify the caseworker if translation was needed.

Generally, the caseworkers were familiar with the language challenges of each client, and arranged for translation accordingly, yet sometimes the level of need was difficult to determine. Since volunteers spent so much time with clients, they often pick up on whether clients understand them, but only if they are putting effort into communication. At the same time, there was obvious confusion among volunteers about what should be said to clients, what shouldn't be said, and how to begin communicating with them at the most basic level. Many volunteers noted that they were concerned about giving clients the wrong information, and others didn't know that they were expected to explain anything to the clients. I can only assume that for a client, following an 18 year old volunteer around all day to sign and submit paperwork may seem quite alienating if he is not making an effort to explain why you are doing these things.

Despite all of the confusion about what to communicate, miscommunication due to the language barrier was a far greater problem. Often times a client would show up at the GAA because someone had called him and he was confused about what that person said. Volunteers often called clients to tell them about workshops they could attend, to remind them about ESL classes, and to remind them about appointments. Without interpretation, though, phone communication could be quite useless, and confused clients would often arrive at the office on the wrong day or at the wrong time for any number of appointments, or for nothing. When it came to face-to-face interactions with clients who didn't speak English, much of what volunteers said was met with blank stares, or clients replying, "I don't know," which added to their insecurity about the ability to communicate.

For clients who spoke decent English, carrying on a conversation was not a problem, and volunteers naturally felt much more comfortable in terms of their ability to communicate important information. The most common issue mentioned in this scenario, however, was that clients often asked questions volunteers were not be able to answer. A client may have a question about how they can enroll in school, or whether they can move. A common outcome was that GAA volunteers would give the wrong advice, or answer questions they were not qualified to answer. There were several points at which the volunteer intern email-blasted volunteers to ask them not to give advice to clients about concerns that should be taken up with their caseworker. These ranged from interpersonal problems, to housing concerns, and employment decisions, but the parameters were quite vague. Volunteers were neither informed of what they should communicate with clients about, and what they shouldn't. In these instances, volunteers

were instructed to refer the client to the caseworker for answers. The problem was that often times a question or request that seemed simple was often complicated and may lay outside the boundaries of services volunteers should provide.

This happened to me one day when I was out with three new arrivals: one from Sri Lanka, one from Iraq, and one from Eritrea. They arrived the night before, and they each spoke enough English to carry on a good conversation. They had all kinds of questions about life in the US regarding driving, education, jobs, and Oakland weather. I was able to talk to them about some basic things, like personal safety, and some of the social and cultural differences they might notice. Toward the end of the day, I took them to the bank where they deposited their first checks into new checking accounts and each of them withdrew \$15 for food money, which was expected to last them through the weekend. One of the arrivals, a young woman from Sri Lanka, asked me several times throughout the day if she could call her family. This was the first time I was ever asked this question, and the other clients quickly chimed in that they would like to do the same. They each had only \$15, and could return to the bank on Saturday for more money if they needed it, but I knew from overhearing Clare speak with clients that the money should really be saved for food. On the other hand, most of the clients ended up purchasing cell phones very soon after arrival, so I figured, if I could help them purchase \$2.00 calling cards, that might tide them over for a bit.

Even though it hadn't been communicated to me, I knew that when it comes to spending money, the caseworker should really give approval. Since I wasn't sure how this worked, I called Clare and asked her. She said, "Sure, just show them where they can buy one." As we were on our way to a store to buy the calling cards, another

question came up so I called Clare again. She was able to answer my question, and as I explained we were just going to pick up calling cards and would be back in the office shortly, Clare stopped me and explained that I should literally show them where they could buy a calling card, not help them buy one, because they need to save their \$15. This was slightly awkward, because I'd already told the clients I would help them buy these cards. I showed them the store, and tried to explain that they could purchase a card from any "liquor store" in their neighborhood, but that Clare wanted me to bring them back to the office now. The Sri Lankan client became upset because she was afraid her family would be worried if they didn't hear from her. I told her we would tell Clare that she really had to contact her family as soon as possible, and hopefully Clare could help her make the call. While it was clear Clare and I had a miscommunication, I empathized for this woman and was upset by this situation. When we returned, I was insistent with Clare that this woman needed to call her family, and Clare guaranteed me she would help her find a way to do so that evening.

Other volunteers recounted similar experiences where they weren't really sure where the boundaries of the volunteer-client encounter were drawn. What these miscommunications revealed was that the training provided to volunteers was insufficient to cover the gamut of limits and boundaries appropriate and expected for communication with clients. While it is impossible to prepare volunteers for the full array of scenarios in which they will feel unsure of how to respond to a client, it was expected that responses should be based on professional norms in the US. However, since many volunteers were young and had limited, if any, service-related experience, it was fairly common that they were simply unaware of how to handle these situations. Time after time, volunteers felt

doubt or concern about the way they'd handled a situation, and would have to check in with a caseworker after the fact to make sure they'd responded appropriately.

A final communication challenge in the volunteer-client encounter occurred when clients' needs exceeded the availability of staff and volunteers. Two weeks may pass with no arrivals, followed by a week where three families, and four single clients would come. This obviously put a strain on the staff given the fixed number of volunteers they had to rely on each day. Busy days often resulted in caseworkers asking volunteers from other departments to help give bus orientations, and take families to Social Security and Social Services: duties they were largely unfamiliar with. Since these were busy days, this also meant caseworkers had little time to give instructions for how to carry out these duties. Just like new resettlement volunteers who jump into providing services, some of these volunteers reported making mistakes, or felt concerned that the client could tell she was confused and didn't know what to do or where to go. While this dynamic may be inevitable due to the nature of the work, it puts strain on the volunteers and the clients. I began to consider what types of tools and resources could be implemented to supplement the lack of training and instruction. One volunteer who took a family to Social Services instead of Social Security by accident explained, "It felt like the blind leading the blind, and not just for me."

An additional consideration of GAA volunteers' ability to serve clients was their own comprehension of the gravity and immediacy of client needs. For clients who arrived with work experience and spoke English well, it was clear they required less assistance in navigating services, advocating verbally for themselves, and becoming self-sufficient. Ironically, it was these clients who were eligible for the Matching Grant

Employment Program, so they often received continued assistance through the GAA for up to an additional three months. Yet for clients without these skills, the process was much more difficult, and they only had GAA support through the 90 day R&P period. Finding interpreter assistance for these clients was also difficult. Caseworkers and volunteers who comprehended that these clients only had three months to learn to become self-sufficient felt a great urgency to focus on who needed what and how to get it for them. Interns who worked closely with clients, and committed a lot of time to the GAA, really saw the degree of difficulty clients experienced in their transition. Working so closely with the caseworkers, it became clear how much work it took just to arrange for the basics of survival. They also saw how hard it was for them to learn how to navigate everyday life in Oakland, from deciphering mail and bills, to finding the right bus to take, to addressing health concerns with doctors, and budgeting money to make food stamps last for an entire month.

What some volunteers may have initially perceived as honest, do-good, charitable work quickly became an overwhelming and frantic mission to ensure that people who were caught up in a complicated and traumatic mess of global displacement now had what they needed to live, both in the short-term, and eventually in the long-term, since they would soon be on their own. While the interns often reported feeling this sense of urgency, stress and concern for their clients, such sentiments were far less apparent among the volunteers who did not have much one-on-one contact with clients. When those volunteers stepped in to assist with casework in the field, they did not always understand the significance of the work they were doing, and again this meant a higher probability for mistakes and less attention to client needs. While several volunteers

appeared to be consistently unaware of client needs, others explained that they really came to understand the urgency of the resettlement transition through client encounters, which changed their perspective on the work.

One volunteer who'd spent most of her time at the GAA working on administrative office tasks shared an epiphany she'd had while at social services with a large Burmese family. For months she had been working on "resettlement plans" to explain how each family member might eventually become self-sufficient based on the skills and work experience outlined in their casefiles. For a family of this size, she would have explained in the report that the father would look for a job, and the mother would stay home to care for the kids since she had a baby and three other young children. They would apply for refugee cash assistance to supplement the father's income, once he found a job. But now that she was sitting with this family at Social Services, calculating the amount of cash assistance they would receive (especially since refugee cash assistance only lasts eight months) she grew extremely concerned that this just wouldn't be sustainable. For one thing, the father spoke very little English, so any job he found would be low paying, and once he had an income, their cash assistance would be reduced. "How would they pay their rent?" she recounted, explaining that it suddenly dawned on her that becoming "self-sufficient" didn't seem plausible possible for all of the clients. By working with this family directly, she came to have a more nuanced and sensitive understanding of the resettlement process.

While finding volunteers who will commit and take resettlement work seriously should be part of the recruitment and interviewing process, certainly the bigger implication here is that such complex and critical work should be supported by a degree

of funding for which resettlement agencies have the professional support they need to provide efficient services. Current R&P funding is insufficient to guarantee effective services resulting in client caseloads so large that caseworkers cannot accommodate all their client's needs. This leaves organizations scrambling to find good volunteer assistance to help provide those services, yet volunteers require training and commit only for short periods of time putting further strain on staff who are already struggling to meet the needs of clients they cannot fully support. This vicious cycle is often misrepresented or is entirely overlooked in studies of refugee resettlement in the United States that fail to examine the scope of policy and funding, or simply assume that the current level of funding is unalterable. A recent US Government Accountability Office study (2012) of how volags determine community capacity is focused solely on how resettlement services can be enhanced given the current funding structure and policy constraints, without questioning whether the funding and policy is sufficient for meeting the policy objective that refugees become self-sufficient.

Identifying Common Challenges for Volunteers: Agency-Wide

Extending my inquiry into volunteer work beyond the resettlement department, I was curious to learn how GAA services, programs and departments were interconnected, since they appeared to be more specialized and segregated than in 2009. Based on observations and testimonials, it became clear that the staff in other departments were just as busy as the resettlement caseworkers. As a result, their volunteers were also in the process of learning how to carry out their work with limited guidance or instruction. The caseload of clients in other departments similarly exceeded the staff and volunteer

resources available, although to a lesser extent. The volunteer training component, however, was more cohesive in some other programs and those volunteers seemed to be better organized and more self-sufficient. The employment program had its own volunteer handbook, as well as a wealth of templates to work from. The new Health Access Team, who were in the process of developing their program, were also building an accompanying volunteer manual.

While a handbook or manual was something that resettlement volunteers were clearly missing, resettlement work included a much wider array of tasks. This was why resettlement caseworkers would “specialize” their volunteers, who could become experts in casefile work, or at work in the field. I wondered if the reason no one had created a manual for resettlement volunteers was that it seemed like such a daunting task. At the time, it didn’t seem that any resettlement volunteers had broad enough expertise to create a comprehensive guide, and there certainly weren’t any volunteers who had the time. In 2009, it was the Volunteer Coordinator who had the knowledge to train volunteers comprehensively. Without that resource, there were so many clients who required so much assistance, that caseworkers pushed new volunteers into work with only the minimal necessary training. Volunteers came to see the “learn as you go” approach as synonymous with the culture of the organization.

When I began to focus on other volunteer programs, those volunteers were as curious about what resettlement volunteers did as I was in what they did. It became very clear that outside of their own program, hardly any of the volunteers knew what other volunteers did, and no one really knew about the scope of services provided at the GAA. While some programs were more heavily connected, such as resettlement and health

access (we had to communicate often regarding health needs and client appointments), volunteers rarely had work-related contact with volunteers in other programs. This led to significant gaps in knowledge among volunteers, and hindered their ability to provide comprehensive services, especially in the area of referrals. For example, resettlement volunteers often worked with clients who wanted to bring their families to the US. I'd had many clients ask me how they could bring over a wife or children, but I was unaware of how this worked, so I usually suggested they speak to the caseworker about how to do so. As I learned about the immigration department at the GAA, I found they offered this service. While it would still be up to the actual caseworker to refer the client to the immigration department, at least I now had the knowledge to explain this to our clients.

Having information about the other services, departments and programs seemed like an obvious benefit for all GAA volunteers, and something that could enhance service efficiency. The increased communication between the health access team and resettlement volunteers was highly productive because we were able to streamline certain services after we realized there had been some overlap and confusion about which group of volunteers was in charge of which health-related task. I also learned that resettlement volunteers could access employment department résumés while creating resettlement plans to avoid duplicating work, and that we could turn directly to the volunteers assisting with in-kind donations to figure out what items they had in storage for incoming arrivals.

The lack of inter-departmental knowledge was particularly detrimental when volunteers answered phones and assisted clients in the waiting room. All GAA volunteers were expected to answer phones, and they were often the only people

available to do so because staff were so busy. Most days there was a front desk volunteer, whose sole duty was to answer the phone and assist clients who came into the office, directing each person to the appropriate staff member or volunteer. However, it was common that the phone rang off the hook because that person was already on a call or assisting clients in the waiting room, hence the need for all volunteers to answer phones. While the front desk volunteer learned very quickly how to direct clients because it was their sole duty, the other volunteers had a difficult time with this. Often, a client would call, and if the volunteer was unable to determine how to direct the call, she would have to interrupt and ask a staff member, who would then pick up the phone and take over in directing the call, thereby negating the point of having volunteers answer the phone in the first place. Other times, volunteers directed the call to the wrong person, or took vague messages that may or may not make it to the appropriate staff person. Clearly, language barriers further impeded this process, and volunteers who were not accustomed to communicating with limited English language speakers did not have the tools to determine what the caller needed.

One day I was working in Clare's office with her intern, Sun, when a volunteer walked in with a hand-written message. She asked if Clare was in, and we explained that she was on a home visit. She placed the message on the desk and walked out. Sun picked up the message, read it, gasped and handed it to me. According to the message, a client had called and said he'd just come home to find his apartment robbed. First, it was alarming that the volunteer didn't understand the urgency of the matter and thought it was ok to simply leave the message for Clare to address later that day. Second, it seemed surprising that she didn't ask him for details or if we should call the police. As Sun and I

discussed who should call him back, Nicole, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, overheard and walked in. She decided to call the client back to make sure he was alright, but first we went to find the volunteer who took the message. The volunteer explained that the client sounded fine, and though she had a hard time understanding him, he explained that he came home and his apartment had been robbed. Nicole called him, and they had a long exchange due to the language barrier. Upon several back and forth confirmations that he had actually called to ask about an appointment with Clare, and that his house had not been robbed, we determined that this was a miscommunication.

Other common incidents resulted from a lack of communication and awareness about GAA services. In November of 2012, the immigration department took on a new program to provide assistance with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA clients were typically undocumented immigrants, so they were not refugees or asylees, and they were typically Spanish speaking. Unfortunately, this was not communicated to any of the volunteers outside of the immigration department, which was physically separated from the rest of the office. One morning I overheard an employment volunteer take a call from a Spanish-speaking woman who asked about DACA. The volunteer did her best to communicate in English and Spanish, and explained that we provided services for refugees and asylees. She asked the woman if she was a refugee or asylee, and when the woman said no, the volunteer explained, "I'm sorry, but we don't provide services for people who aren't refugees and asylees." She hung up the phone. Later that day, I approached one of our Immigration Caseworkers to ask if she knew of any other organizations that provided DACA services since we'd received a call that day, and I knew we could expect more. She looked at me wide-eyed and explained that she

just began providing DACA services at the GAA, and was already taking clients. I explained that none of the volunteers were aware of this, so this may not be the first time a potential client has been incidentally turned away. I immediately emailed the Volunteer Intern and asked her to send out an email to notify volunteers about this program, while the Immigration Caseworker made flyers to tape to all of the phones in the office.

In terms of office-wide challenges for volunteers, the lack of comprehensive information about GAA services was highly problematic. If volunteers were the ones who spent the most time with clients, and were in charge of directing clients to the right staff person, they really needed to know more about the GAA. Though my focus was on improving resettlement services in some way, it was clear that addressing these information barriers would help. While the reliance on volunteers in this capacity is less ideal than employing professional staff, research shows that there is great significance to volunteer support when it comes to flexibility (i.e. capacity of support and time commitment).

Identifying Common Challenges for Clients

Since a main goal for this project was to explore service barriers for recently resettled refugees, working directly with GAA clients provided great insight about the service encounter. I often worked with the same clients several times throughout the R&P period, and saw them after that if they returned to the GAA for classes or other services. Most of the information I collected regarding client experiences was taken from my participant observation in the field, where I explained to clients (to the best of my ability) what I was working on. When I began my work at the GAA as Clare's volunteer,

I served Bhutanese, Burmese and Sri Lankan clients, most of whom spoke limited, if any, English. This meant that I was also limited in terms of the type of communication I was able to have with them, aside from discussing basic needs and expectations. Often these clients had US Ties (family members or friends) who had also been resettled by the GAA over the past several years, and who now had more experience with English. When relatives or interpreters who were resettled by the GAA joined us in the field, we were able to have productive discussions about their resettlement experiences, and how it was going for the new clients. I also got to know many of the other caseworker's clients because I stepped in to help when she was short on volunteers. Her clients were from Eritrea, Iraq and Afghanistan, and some of them spoke English fluently. It was interesting to see how the transition varied among clients from different countries, for clients who arrived alone versus clients who arrived with their families, and whether clients had free cases or US Ties. Depending on the circumstances, clients faced differing challenges.

Clients with free cases often reported having more trouble adjusting. To assist with the transition, single adults (with free cases) were often strategically resettled with other young, single adults. The GAA housed these clients together, and those I spoke with felt it was helpful for them to be going through this transition with others, especially when their roommates and those they met during resettlement were from the same country and spoke the same language. Even when they were from different places there was often a camaraderie as they learned about each other and shared this common experience. They built networks of mutual aid and were often willing to help each other out. For families that arrived as free cases, their struggle could be much more difficult because they had to support children, and they may not have arrived with other families

or people to turn to for support. Often the caseworkers would try to introduce free case families to other families or individuals who spoke the same language, or were from the same country. They were encouraged to exchange phone numbers and build networks for support. For clients with local US Ties, this level of support and guidance was already established.

Upon arrival, most clients were not entirely sure how the GAA was going to help them, but they had been assured during their pre-departure orientation that the resettlement agency would find them a home, help their children enroll in school, and provide initial support with food, healthcare and cash until they were able to become self-sufficient. This information was often quite vague, however, so when many clients arrived, they weren't sure what to expect over their first days or weeks in the US. Additionally, many clients described Oakland as being very different than the setting they expected for US resettlement. While those with English language skills may be able to ask about the process or understand as volunteers and caseworkers explained the services and timeline for resettlement, those with no English language skills often reported feeling confused, even though many explained they did believe the GAA was providing them with the help they needed. While caseworkers always had an interpreter available for the airport pickup, information about services sometimes had to be translated by phone, based on interpreter availability. So some clients received information about services out of context. Current and past clients also explained that they learned early on (often from observation while waiting in the GAA office) that caseworkers had limited time and were limited in the type of help they could provide. Former clients I spoke with saw the first

couple of weeks as an intense learning experience that could be overwhelming and intimidating in terms of all the information they were taking in.

One US Tie I spoke with arrived several years earlier from Bhutan and recounted his resettlement experience with me, comparing the challenges he faced to the challenges his newly arrived family may have. After 25 hours traveling half way around the world, he stepped off of his plane in Oakland late at night. He arrived alone and had no family or friends in Oakland (this was when the Bhutanese were first being resettled in the area). His caseworker and an interpreter picked him up and took him home where he met his two roommates, who were from Burma. His caseworker made sure he had everything he needed and explained that she would send someone by the next day to pick him up. But when a volunteer arrived the next day, she didn't speak his language, and he didn't understand a word she said to him the entire day. Over time, the caseworker introduced him to some other Bhutanese families, but he still felt like he had to learn how to live a completely new life entirely on his own. He said this was the hardest time of his life. He didn't have much to say about his service encounter, because for the most part he couldn't communicate with the volunteers or his caseworker, who often called an interpreter for assistance with communication during their appointments. He felt like he just had to trust them.

Over the first month, he began picking up English quickly, learning basic words. When two other young Bhutanese men arrived, he was able to move in with them, and he was able to give them advice. Things turned out fine, but reflecting back, he said he really wished the GAA had more interpreters to help during the first couple of weeks. Three years later, he felt much better about living in the US. When it came to his newly

arrived family, a multi-generational family of six, he was happy he could be there to provide interpretation for them during their first day, informing them about the GAA, Social Security and Social Services. He was concerned they would have different types of challenges, particularly their ability to become and remain economically self-sufficient over time. The grandparents would have to apply for SSI, which took time, and the younger kids would be in school, so only the 19 year old son and their widowed mother, who had no work or English skills, would be employable. He was worried their opportunities for employment and/or cash assistance would be limited.

What stood out to me the most about his story was that for his first week in Oakland, he didn't really understand what the GAA was. Though it was clear his caseworker was there to help him with certain things, he didn't understand the limits and extent of their services. I came to realize that many GAA volunteers, myself included, assumed that clients knew about more about the organization and its services than they really did. One day I picked up two new clients the day after their arrival. I was asked to meet them at their apartment and bring them back to the office on the bus. When I arrived at their apartment, I explained that Zahra sent me and I was from the GAA. They spoke decent English and asked me about Oakland on our way to the office. I pointed out landmarks, reminding them several times that they would have to learn how to get to the GAA. As we exited the bus, I pointed to street signs so they knew where to exit, and then I pointed up to the building where the GAA office is located. At this point I had probably mentioned that I was from the GAA or that we were going to the GAA about a dozen times. As we crossed the street, one of the young men turned to me and said, "I'm confused...what is 'GAA'?" Clearly I had made several assumptions here. I assumed

that they were aware the GAA was the organization that was appointed to help them with their resettlement. Within that assumption, I was also assuming that they had the same conceptual understanding of an organization, of resettlement, and of services that I possessed. They knew I was sent by Zahra, the caseworker who had picked them up at the airport the day before, but most of what I'd said had not been clear. Since they were familiar with the caseworker's name, I explained, "the GAA is where your caseworker, Zahra, works," and I went on to describe what the GAA was and how it would be a part of their lives for the next several months, maybe longer, as they transitioned to life in Oakland.

Speaking with new clients, as well as US Ties and interpreters (who had been resettled in Oakland over recent years), I found many recurring themes among client questions and concerns that came up during the R&P period. Like my earlier time at the GAA, personal safety was listed as a huge concern for clients. Past clients often had stories about how they or their friends had been assaulted on the street or on the bus. Many of them had more than one story about street crime. While clients reported that they received safety orientations from caseworkers, it was often through new friends over their first days or weeks in Oakland that they began to hear stories about crime. It was upsetting for them to feel they'd been placed in an environment where crime was a problem, and they became very aware of the need to practice personal safety. One client told me he simply refused to go outside after dark, but began to feel isolated, restricted and depressed. Clients also explained that some muggings went unreported because the victims were afraid of retaliation from the attackers, or they felt fear and mistrust of the police, which may have stemmed from traumatic experiences (with police and military)

prior to resettlement. Resettlement staff and volunteers were often adamant that clients should feel comfortable reaching out to the police here, and assured them that the police would help in an emergency. However, because muggings seemed so common, some clients said it might not seem worth it to involve the police.

Since they didn't have friends or family to help, clients who arrived as free cases had to turn to GAA staff and volunteers concerning advice and basic orientation questions. Among current and former clients, their immediate questions and concerns after arrival included how to navigate Oakland by bus and use a map; how and where to use the EBT card; how to communicate with the landlord; where to find other adult ESL classes; how to get a driver's license; how to manage bills; how to find tutoring for kids; how to choose the best route to get kids to school and back; how parents should communicate with teachers; and so on. Essentially, these were topics that the caseworkers briefly covered during orientations, but for which they had little, if any time, to consult. In 2009, the point of the Family Mentor program was to fulfill precisely these needs through personalized orientation assistance. Now that more families who arrived had US Ties, their family and friends could help in this area, although sometimes the level of assistance and advice needed went above and beyond the anchor's expertise, and those with free cases still had to rely on the GAA for orientation support.

While reflecting on his family's resettlement several years earlier, one US Tie explained how helpful their family mentor was. He said that when his brother's family arrived in late 2012, he was very upset that the caseworker told him there weren't any mentors available for them. He didn't know how the kids would learn to do their homework, or how the parents would become self-sufficient without that extra support.

His wife could try to help the new family get settled, but she still didn't speak much English. Their caseworker referred them to another organization, Refugee Transitions, for tutoring and ESL support, but they were waitlisted. It became very clear that the orientation aspect of services was lacking without the use of family mentor volunteers, and that without decent training for resettlement volunteers, they wouldn't be able to supplement that information during their time with clients.

Clients understood their caseworkers were busy, so when questions arose, those who had English language skills would often ask volunteers for help, while others who knew the caseworker could contact an interpreter would drop in to the office and wait until the caseworker was available. At times volunteers weren't able to answer the questions asked of them, and they simply referred the clients back to the caseworker. Several clients mentioned that they were able to find certain volunteers who were very helpful, in which case, they would come to the office in search of that volunteer or intern. One client explained that there was a volunteer who spoke his language, so he would call for her or come to the office on the days she was in to ask for help with services and translation.

Clients were very grateful for the help of volunteers, realizing they dedicated their free time to helping new arrivals. When I asked clients how volunteers were helpful, they often explained that volunteers accompanied them to appointments and knew what to say to the workers, advocating for them and providing support and comfort. Yet, only rarely did a client say that a volunteer helped him or her find answers to questions, link them to resources, or teach them about life in Oakland. For volunteers who were mentioned in that light, clients pinpointed specific individuals who really stood out to them because

they went above and beyond simply accompanying them somewhere. Clients felt that these volunteers did their best to communicate information to them, and relayed their needs or concerns to the caseworker. The volunteers who were mentioned by current clients as being particularly helpful were also those whom the caseworkers trusted and depended on the most.

In examining the client-volunteer encounter (the most common encounter for clients), as well as the orientation process, it seemed there was a clear explanation for many of the current service barriers. Since there was no longer a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator at the GAA: 1) the family mentor program had essentially faded away, depriving new clients of the much-needed orientation support; 2) volunteers were not provided with thorough or succinct information about GAA programs, hindering their ability to connect clients to the right staff or services; 3) resettlement volunteers (along with volunteers in other programs) no longer received sufficient training to carry out their duties efficiently; and 4) many volunteers were less able to communicate successfully with clients or respond to clients concerns with adequate information. While my initial goal for this project was to enhance orientation services for recently resettled refugees, it seemed there was little, if any, possibility to do so, since such a responsibility would likely fall on the shoulders of volunteers who didn't have the training necessary to provide any such services. Orientation services could only improve if volunteers were trained how and when to approach such topics with the clients.

Assessing Volunteer and Client Challenges with Staff

Though I had been checking in with staff as consistently as I was with clients and volunteers, the staff were much more limited in their availability, and were often too busy to stop and provide thoughtful answers to my questions. The fact that staff were so busy confirmed that opportunities for enhancing services really lay with the volunteers. They had the most free time and flexibility for filling service gaps and spent the most time working with clients. In order to consult with caseworkers, I discovered that if I offered to help them shop for clients at Wal-Mart, or set up apartments, we would have one-on-one time with limited interruption. While I knew that volunteer training was the area most in need of improvement, I was still curious to explore the orientation process, and see how orientation services could be incorporated into volunteer training.

First, I explored the extent of orientation services that clients had access to. In addition to brief tutorials on specific topics (i.e. a housing and safety is provided at each client's home), the caseworkers provided all resettlement clients with one comprehensive orientation, using an interpreter if necessary, that covered the basics of life in the US. While no client is expected to learn all they need to know to become self-sufficient over the course of an hour or two, caseworkers supplemented the learning process as questions arose for clients. Caseworkers also provided clients with an in-depth, hand-written orientation guide, which provided step-by-step instructions and tips for navigating systems such as healthcare, education, employment, and housing, as well as resources for further assistance. However, this guide was only available in English, so often the clients who needed the information the most, were the least able to use it.

One of the most important resources that caseworkers tried to provide for clients, who did not speak or read English, was access to someone who spoke their language,

whom they could contact if they needed assistance with interpretation. Other GAA resources that supplemented the orientation process included ESL and job classes, which were available for all new clients. Additionally, clients now had access to volunteers who could provide specialized support and advice regarding mental health and health, two services that were not provided at the GAA in years earlier. The newest client support program was financial literacy, a series of workshops that were meant to educate clients about the basics of banking and financial accountability in the US. Comparing the GAA of today to the GAA of 2009, it was clear that there were now more specialized programs for clients concerning these critical orientation topics. The concern was that there were other significant orientation topics for which clients received little information beyond the basic orientation provided by the resettlement caseworker: education, safety, housing, and community resources beyond the GAA.

In discussing the gaps I saw when it came to volunteer training and client orientation, both caseworkers had productive feedback and ideas. They agreed that it would be helpful if resettlement volunteers, while out in the field, took the initiative to discuss orientation information with clients, and ask them what questions they had about starting their new lives in Oakland. Caseworkers had received positive feedback from clients regarding resettlement volunteers who informed them about the American systems they would encounter, such as schools or jobs in the United States, yet it was clear that these particular volunteers were taking extra initiative to do so. Since the limited training left volunteers feeling unsure of what was expected of them, caseworkers agreed that it would be great to find a way to encourage volunteers to make their time in the field as productive as possible. This would entail familiarizing volunteers with orientation topics,

as well as the particular types of information GAA clients need most. At the same time, volunteers would require instruction as to which information they were qualified to discuss with clients, and which information was beyond their expertise and should be provided by the caseworker or another professional.

Caseworkers concurred that certain volunteers were highly regarded by clients and were often sought out as a resource because they were consistently helpful and responsive to client questions and concerns. However, some volunteers did not have a thorough understanding of client needs or the systems clients would have to rely on in the US. In this case, volunteers should only discuss topics they had knowledge of or experience with. Often it was more problematic when a client received misinformation, than if s/he received no information at all. When we considered the costs and benefits of incorporating orientation support into resettlement volunteer training, the benefits were significant. The trick was figuring out how to implement such training. If we could find a way to provide volunteers with tools for communicating more effectively, along with guidelines for discussing orientation topics, this would be largely beneficial for the clients. This would also clear up volunteer misconceptions about staff expectations. The more volunteers worked on their communication skills with clients, the more comfortable they would feel and the more capable they would become. Ideas for tools that volunteers could use to promote communication and orientation support included: creating laminated pictures of US bills and coins; basic suggestions for practicing English; supplying volunteers with maps for teaching clients how to navigate the city; and lists of topics outlining basic information that we often take for granted. An example of this may be having a discussion about the types of identification you should carry with you at all

times, and practicing basic English phrases in an array of scenarios (i.e. at the bank or supermarket).

In order to consider all possibilities, I also asked the caseworkers what they thought of creating an orientation workshop for clients that could be provided by a volunteer (or volunteers), with a set curriculum, which would supplement the caseworker orientation and cover those topics in more depth. This could be a forum where clients would have time to ask questions, and where we would discuss other community resources, such as the library, to cover areas formerly under the scope of the Family Mentor program. Clare thought this was an excellent idea, especially if it was incorporated with the other workshops being organized by the financial literacy intern, and the health access team. Her concern, however, was that volunteer resources were already stretched too thin, and she didn't really see how any current volunteers would be able to dedicate their time to this. In terms of practicality, she suggested this would be a great project for the long run, but may not be easy to implement in the short-term, where need was acute.

The response from Zahra, the other caseworker, was similar but reflected some of her larger concerns about the assumption that workshops are the best answer to client education and support. She implored me to consider the current Financial Literacy workshop. This workshop was organized by a dedicated intern who took the time to design the curriculum so that clients with varying English language ability would learn about everything from basic banking (how to read a bank statement, use checks and avoid service fees) to the use of credit over the course of four workshops. She implemented pre and post-tests to determine client comprehension and provided clients with handouts to

keep at home. The workshop was offered over the course of four Wednesday afternoons, right after the ESL class so that clients could go directly from one class to the other. Unfortunately attendance was very low, and many clients came to only one or two sessions, missing out on the bulk of the curriculum. When asked why they weren't attending the workshop, some clients explained that they already came to the GAA too frequently and didn't want to have to come on another day, or didn't want to stay for so long. Others wanted to focus more on finding a job and ensuring that their immediate needs were met before dedicating time to a new class. For some who already had jobs, the workshop was not offered at a convenient time. Workshop attendance ranged from three to six clients when there were easily a couple dozen new arrivals who could have benefitted. Zahra was concerned that if I created a workshop and offered it myself, I would face the same barriers. When the Financial Literacy intern left, she was able to find and train a replacement, but the replacement struggled with the same challenges. With the amount of time and energy she dedicated, it wasn't clear if this was really a lucrative endeavor, and they eventually switched to providing financial literacy support to clients on the basis of individual need and availability.

Over my time at the GAA, the Health Access team was also in the process of creating its own workshop curriculum to educate clients about how to use their Medi-Cal benefits, how to navigate health systems, and how to incorporate basic health, nutrition and wellness into everyday life. Though these volunteer programs provided support and services that filled client needs which were previously unmet, it wasn't entirely clear how successful the workshop format was. On a broad level, caseworkers were concerned that GAA volunteers failed to understand that while health and financial literacy are

important, other essential orientation topics were being overlooked. Rather than provide a comprehensive orientation to navigating American systems, it seemed volunteers came in with a focus on how to address very specific needs. In doing so, they failed to realize that without reviewing these topics within a broader orientation context, the clients may not see the broader connections. Clients need to understand, for example, how medical treatment relates to financial accountability, or where to seek assistance in the event that they require medical treatment that Medi-Cal won't cover. Additionally, no matter the degree to which a workshop is intended to accommodate a range of limited language English speakers, those who spoke the least English would be at a disadvantage. In addition to these concerns, the overall challenge of client attendance remained. Zahra, in particular, recommended that I consider other options, and I agreed.

Revisiting the idea of training resettlement volunteers on orientation topics to supplement the Family Mentor gap, we agreed that this seemed to be the most lucrative option. Resettlement volunteers may spend up to a full day working one-on-one with clients in the field, most of which would be spent traveling or waiting. While the number of days or hours each client spent with resettlement volunteers ranged broadly, it could be estimated that each client has a minimum of eight hours simply waiting with resettlement volunteers over the course of the 90 day R&P period. While these service encounters are more random than standardized, overall service effectiveness could be greatly improved if volunteers knew how to make use of this time in a more productive manner than simply waiting with a client and focusing on small talk. No matter how informal the setting, well-trained volunteers would be able to provide clients with more intensive support. By focusing on volunteer training, I could implement an intervention that would address the

numerous and broad information gaps that all volunteers faced, while incorporating tools for enhancing service delivery to clients (i.e. by expanding orientation support).

Designing the Intervention

Working closely with the caseworkers and the Site Supervisor, I developed a plan to supplement volunteer training. In making the point that training volunteers to provide enhanced orientation support would be beneficial for clients, I was able to highlight how the gap in volunteer training was at the root of an array of service barriers. I began to identify particular training gaps, and recounted ethnographic examples to illustrate where, why and how these problems arose. Given the information I collected from volunteers and clients, staff also came to see that volunteer training was particularly crucial to the provision of efficient and effective services, though it was often considered a less critical matter in the grand scheme of resettlement work (than, say, finding housing for clients). Enhancing volunteer training would correct some of the service delivery inefficiency and it would also allow for incorporating new service components to fill subsequent gaps, such as the lack of Family Mentor support.

The main gaps we agreed should be addressed included orienting volunteers to the departments and services provided at the GAA Oakland office, providing an overview of the resettlement process for clients, explaining in detail the duties and responsibilities expected of resettlement volunteers, and providing instruction for how to carry out those duties. Such information would be provided to volunteers before they began working with clients. The final consideration was to determine which format for a training intervention would be most effective. While creating a training in workshop or video

format seemed like one option, we decided there was no way it would be sufficient or appropriate given the current logistics. Resettlement volunteers started their work at the GAA sporadically, so there would rarely be more than one volunteer to orient at a time. Caseworkers would be unable to provide such an orientation this given their time limitations, and the only other people at the GAA who were familiar enough with resettlement services to do so were seasoned resettlement volunteers. Since volunteers came and went frequently, and were needed to carry out the resettlement work, consistency could be a problem. Resettlement duties were also so numerous and varied that it simple wouldn't be possible to teach a new volunteer how to do everything over the course of a single orientation.

As far as accessibility, it was essential to present training materials to volunteers before they began their work for orientation purposes, but this information should also be within reach over time as volunteers learned how to carry out new tasks. It could take months at the GAA to become familiar with the full realm of resettlement duties, so it seemed the only training format that would meet all of these criteria would be to create a comprehensive volunteer manual. This way each volunteer could reference the material as needed over time and find instructions for how to carry out each new task requested of them by the caseworker. By creating a component that would introduce volunteers to agency-wide services, programs and departments, as well as tasks that were expected of all volunteers, such as answering the phones, the information in this manual would also address the information gaps that all GAA Oakland volunteers faced.

In November of 2012, I met with the Executive Director and the Site Supervisor to discuss the findings of my initial research, and I presented them with a written

proposal to create a comprehensive training manual for resettlement volunteers.

Outlining current organizational barriers to volunteer training, I showed how the lack of training negatively impacted services for clients. I addressed the challenges clients faced, and how many of their orientation needs were now unmet or under addressed without the assistance of Family Mentors. Detailing particular volunteer-client scenarios, I suggested that creating tools for comprehensive training would address many of the gaps on the volunteer end. In addition to outlining organizational information and instructions for how carry out duties, I would also incorporate organizational expectations. Since confusion about expectations was prevalent among the volunteers I spoke with, this manual would provide volunteers with guidelines for maximizing their communication with clients, by directing them to address key orientation information and client questions more pro-actively. Here, I could explicitly delineate which information volunteers should share or discuss with clients, and which information or questions should be addressed by the caseworker.

The Executive Director enthusiastically agreed to the proposal and requested that I work directly with the Site Supervisor to finalize the details of the intervention and implement it. As we discussed agency-wide training for volunteers, he asked if I could develop something for each of the programs. Since I didn't want to duplicate resources that were already in existence for volunteers in other programs, I agreed to create one component that would address agency-wide gaps for all volunteers, and one component that would be specific to the resettlement work. Rather than simply writing a manual, I began to conceptualize the intervention as the development of a toolkit, with manual components and other resources that could be accessible for all GAA volunteers.

Since my exploratory fieldwork was so extensive, I was able to determine which information should be included in the manuals. I made it known around the GAA that I would be creating volunteer training materials, and I began to talk to volunteers about how they would like to utilize the toolkit and how it should be implemented. First, the manual would have to be a living document to maintain relevance since the organization was constantly in flux. As organizational or environmental changes arose, volunteers would be able to incorporate that information, suggesting changes, additions and edits to the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator, who would update the manual regularly. Based on feedback, it was clear that the manual needed to be thorough, but also simple to use and easy to understand. The resettlement manual of the toolkit, for example, should address each step of the resettlement process so that volunteers would have an overview to review before they began their work, but also step-by-step instructions that they could use while out in the field. The toolkit would answer the common questions that staff were asked time and time again.

Given the hectic office environment and because volunteers paid little attention to the limited, yet cumbersome, informational materials that were already available to them, it was very clear that the usefulness of the tool must be immediately obvious to the volunteer. Volunteers required comprehensive instructions quickly, so the more concise, the better. While writing instructions for how to carry out simple tasks would be straightforward, it was far more challenging to figure out how to provide the level of information and insight necessary to train volunteers to communicate with clients. Based on my conversations with volunteers who felt uncomfortable or unsure of what to say during their time with clients, I deduced that it would be helpful to outline basic

orientation topics and provide simple, yet concrete tips for starting such a discussion with clients. By emphasizing the utility of cross-cultural comparison, I hoped to present techniques that would appeal to volunteers because they presented opportunities for co-learning.

Since volunteers in other programs had handbooks at their disposal, I consulted with them about which information (in their respective guides) was useful for them, which was not, and which formats for presenting particular types of information were most helpful. The most common feedback I received was that handbooks for other volunteer departments included detailed instructions for carrying out their tasks, but they lacked more comprehensive information about the organization and the clients. Volunteers did want to know how to answer the phone and how to communicate better with clients. They also wanted to know about the circumstances that left our clients displaced. I was able to fit these requests into the design of the toolkit.

In other instances, my conversations with volunteers revealed potential challenges I would face in implementing something like a manual, which would require that volunteers engage the materials. For volunteers, turning to the manual for guidance had to seem easier and more helpful than simply asking a staff member. Similarly, staff would have to respond to simple inquiries by referring volunteers to the toolkit.

One day I asked Amy, an Employment Volunteer, about her experience using the Employment Volunteer Handbook. She was just starting her second week at the GAA and had committed to coming in five days a week until she found a job. Amy looked up from her computer and replied, “What handbook?” Ironically, the Handbook, a four-inch binder emblazoned with large bold text identifying it as the “**EMPLOYMENT**

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK,” was sitting right beside the files she was working on. I showed it to her and pointed out that the previous volunteer showed it to her on her first day. Amy shrugged and added, “well, that’s not really the culture here, you know, the culture is more learn-as-you-go,” adding that it was so big and she had so many people to help that it didn’t really seem worth her time to look at it. As she showed me the résumé templates she’d built to make her job easier, another employment volunteer chimed in and explained that there were already templates saved on the computer for this purpose, as noted in the handbook. With the everyday commotion of the office, Amy clarified that she never really knew who to ask when she did have questions and that everything seemed so straightforward that she was able to figure out many things on her own.

This brought up two concerns for me in terms of designing a usable toolkit. First, Amy had clearly duplicated work that had already been done to make her job easier, so I wanted to figure out how to prevent work duplication in the future. Second, when I asked her about the “learn-as-you-go culture,” she said that this was a dynamic she observed daily when it came to volunteers at the GAA. Many of them had a lot of work to do and there simply weren’t enough staff to answer their questions. It was obvious to Amy that volunteers were doing a lot of guesswork. While some amount of guesswork is always unavoidable when you are learning a new job, I wanted to make sure this toolkit would derail this agency-wide trend and redirect volunteers and staff to use the instructional materials that were available. While my conversation with Amy also left me slightly concerned about the manual format, I knew it would be essential to make sure all volunteers had easy access to the toolkit and to explain how they should use it, with the

guarantee that proper use would clear up misinformation and confusion. I would have to demonstrate its usefulness.

The Volunteer Toolkit

Designing the “GAA Oakland Office Volunteer Toolkit” was an ongoing process that took place between December 2012 and March 2013. The first version of the Toolkit was completed and disseminated in January, with several updated versions following in February, in response to volunteer and staff feedback regarding changes and information that should be added. Since the Toolkit is a living document, there is no finalized version, but after consulting with staff and volunteers, we agreed that the March 15th version included all of the necessary information to address both basic and specific volunteer questions.

The Volunteer Toolkit (Appendix A) is composed of two Modules. Module 1 (Appendix A, page 4) is for all GAA volunteers. It provides an introduction to GAA services, departments, and volunteer programs, along with visual flow charts. It includes an overview of who the staff members are, how to answer phones and greet clients, guidelines and tips for volunteer-client communication, a phone directory, a list of current classes and drop-in services, as well as an overview of the GAA client populations. The intention behind Module 1 was to create a quick and simple review of all the basic information that any GAA volunteer should know or might ask about. With this information, volunteers will be equipped to navigate the office and provide general assistance, directing clients to the correct staff or services.

Module 2 of the toolkit consists of the particular handbooks that exist for each volunteer program, outlining how to perform the responsibilities that pertain to each of those programs. I created a “Module 2” for the Front Desk (Appendix A, page 18) and Resettlement Volunteer positions (Appendix A, page 20). Since several departments had their own handbooks, then Module 2 for those programs was already complete. Past volunteers and staff had already written or were in the process of creating handbooks for Health Access, Employment and Immigration. Depending on the volunteer program then, each volunteer would receive Module 1 for all volunteers, and then Module 2 for their volunteer position, if one existed. In the event that a volunteer is asked to assist in another department, they will also have easy access to the other Module 2 program components, which were located on the computer server and in print in the designated Volunteer Toolkit resource area. Some volunteers, such as those who assisted with In-Kind donations or ESL classes, didn’t really require the level of training or direction that a step-by-step manual had to offer, so this component was not relevant to all volunteers.

Module 2 for Front Desk Volunteers is brief because the majority of the information that is relevant to their work is in Module 1. Front desk volunteers are responsible for answering phones and greeting clients who come to the GAA, so the information they require is in the organizational overview in Module 1, as it helps them determine how to direct clients to the correct staff. Since the GAA is sometimes short-handed in the reception area, volunteers in other programs are frequently asked to sit at the front desk and assist with directing clients in person or by phone, so it was very important that this information was covered in Module 1. Module 2 for Front Desk volunteers provided greater detail about what was expected of these volunteers, as well as

tips for how to address the basic scenarios they might encounter while working in the reception area, such as how to deal with a client who shows up with urgent needs.

Module 2 for Resettlement Volunteers includes several components, beginning with an overview of basic resettlement duties, a timeline of essential Reception and Placement services, and an explanation of how different types of cases are characterized at the GAA and why. This guide includes more thorough instructions for communicating with clients, such as icebreakers, prompts for reviewing orientation information with clients, how to address client questions and concerns, and how to deescalate stressful situations. The second section of the module includes step-by-step instructions for carrying out common resettlement tasks, with an explanation of the significance of each action, application, and/or document. This is followed by a glossary of common terms and acronyms that volunteers will come across in their work, as well as a list of important phone numbers that volunteers or clients may need to use in the field. The Resettlement guide also includes several appendices with sample forms, casefile guidelines, and budget information.

When it came to implementation, we decided that both incoming and current volunteers must have easy access to the Toolkit. Once the first iteration of each Module was completed, we printed copies to keep in the office and sent them out to new volunteers, providing them with both an electronic document and printed booklet. In the biweekly Volunteer Newsletter email, the Volunteer Intern announced the completion of the Toolkit and referred volunteers to review it. Simultaneously, I was turning to new and seasoned volunteers, as well as staff for feedback and suggestions, reviewing the materials with them, which allowed me to update the Toolkit components I created each

week. Since the Toolkit is a living document, the Introduction outlines where to find the most updated electronic version on the GAA server. I also printed the relevant modules of the Toolkit for each staff member to keep in their office so that their volunteers have easy access to it while working. In the Volunteer Office, we dedicated a shelf to the Volunteer Toolkit, to serve as a library of all written instructional and informational training materials, featuring a master and copies of each module that were readily available for any volunteer to use. Upon her return, the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator ordered binders and other materials so that we could better incorporate extraneous resources and copies of blank documents that volunteers could pull directly from the binders as they reviewed the “how-to” instructions. As the Toolkit became increasingly finalized, I began to print a surplus of booklet-sized copies, so that incoming and current volunteers could pick them up as needed. To maximize usability, I added tabs to the Table of Contents for each section so that volunteers would be able to find the information they needed more efficiently.

I was initially concerned that implementing the toolkit would be a challenge because this type of intervention required a shift in organizational behavior, especially in the resettlement department where volunteers were bombarded with clients from day one. The Volunteer Intern and the Resettlement Caseworkers (though it took some time to get them into the practice) have been extremely crucial to the implementation process, assisting in disseminating the toolkit to new volunteers and requesting that they take an hour or two to review the toolkit before they begin their work. I found that my persistence in showing staff and volunteers how to use the toolkit, and asking them for feedback was one catalyst for their use. I began to notice that toolkits were often sitting

beside every workstation, and that volunteers in all departments were reviewing them. On several occasions I overheard staff direct their volunteers to use the Toolkit to find answers to their questions, and one Caseworker ended up turning to the toolkit herself to double check logistical social service information. Perhaps the best praise came from caseworkers and volunteers from other departments who actually used the resettlement manual for carrying out resettlement volunteer duties on under-staffed days.

Since I possessed a good deal of organizational knowledge at this point, I also became a go-to person for questions. Rather than answer those questions, I would grab a toolkit, sit down with the volunteer, and show her how to find the answer. The toolkit was also met with very positive feedback from the more experienced volunteers who recognized the necessity of training materials. Building upon the Toolkit concept, Clare created her own specialized binder for her volunteers incorporating the Toolkit along with other training materials and handouts that she wanted her volunteers to use. As changes occurred, the volunteers were consistent in leaving notes for me or the Volunteer Intern to notify us of missing information or updates to incorporate in the toolkit. For example, when the location of the Oakland Social Security office changed practically overnight, I was able to update the Toolkit quickly enough that none of the new volunteers ended up at the wrong location.

The Volunteer and Intern Coordinator and her intern have been working consistently to bring the Toolkit to the forefront of organizational practice when it comes to welcoming new volunteers. Most recently the staff from the GAA office in Sacramento came to Oakland for a meeting. As I began to tell their Volunteer Coordinator what I had been working on at the GAA, he replied, “oh, you made the

Toolkit with the Modules...I'm just working on adapting it for use in our office!" Since most offices that provide refugee resettlement services, especially within the GAA, carry out their services in a comparable manner and rely on volunteers for carrying out similar duties, the layout of the GAA Oakland Volunteer Toolkit may turn out to be highly useful for other offices. Based on the feedback from the Sacramento Volunteer Coordinator and the conclusions of social scientists who have studied resettlement agencies (Erickson 2012), my research findings are may be applicable to refugee resettlement services more broadly, and the same is likely true for the intervention. In the final stage of the Toolkit, I will be speaking with the Volunteer and Intern Coordinator and the Development Manager to make sure it is made available to other GAA offices. I will also be following up with the resettlement Caseworkers for feedback regarding the guidelines for "Communicating with Clients" to ensure that volunteers are focusing increasingly on orientation support for clients.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Anthropologists have much to contribute in the realm of human systems, processes and practices. In approaching my work at the GAA Oakland, it was clear that staff and volunteers were aware of inefficiencies and obstacles in everyday operations, but they weren't necessarily sure where those problems were rooted, why they came to occur, and how to create changes to prevent them. Among those who were aware of such processes, they certainly did not have the time to address them. Refugee resettlement services exist in a realm where "the results of bureaucratic action are not idiosyncrasies or failures but in some way reflections of the combination of various internal and external power relations surrounding the organization, often crystallized into patterns of organizational routine" (Heyman 2004: 489).

While my research findings implicate the policy and funding regulations of the US Refugee Admissions Program as the key obstacles that volags must overcome to provide effective services, resettlement agencies such as the GAA still have to function on a daily basis. In spite of the systemic barriers these organizations face, I was able to identify basic gaps in service delivery (i.e. services that were not provided due to miscommunication between staff and volunteers) and information dissemination (among staff, volunteers, and clients) that potentially impeded successful outcomes for GAA clients. Recurring themes appeared in my data indicating which problems were endemic in the service encounter, where these obstacles were rooted, how they were accidentally reinforced, and how this produced gaps in knowledge between staff and volunteers on the one hand, and service providers and clients on the other. Tracing chronic service barriers

back to recent changes in the role of the Volunteer Coordinator, the discontinuation of the Family Mentor program, and the absence of volunteer training, I was able to create a comprehensive and easily implementable intervention at the GAA that will ease the strain on staff and volunteers, and ideally lead to improved service encounters for recently resettled refugees.

In her seminal essay on “studying up,” Laura Nader (1972) argued that employing a “vertical slice” approach allows us to test certain types of hypotheses across levels or groups for comparative purposes, but it also, quite simply, allows us to make sense of complexity and messiness characteristic of organizational dynamics. The goal of research that incorporates studying up, down and sideways can be to uncover contradictions that present themselves at the micro and macro level. In this case, it is to ask what refugee resettlement looks like, and why and how it works the way it does, taking into account the interests and actions of stakeholders at all points of the service encounter. It also seeks to connect the dots between national policies and organizational structure, as well as the people who provide those services and the people who receive them. All too often we look at those who engage willingly or unwillingly with such bureaucracies and how that engagement affects them without exploring the multitude of internal and external factors that shape organizational practices. Just as this study reveals how inadequate training prevented volunteers from being effective and confident agents of support thereby degrading services for clients, a similar study that explored only the perspectives of agency staff or clients might have underemphasized the influence of volunteers in the service encounter. To understand processes like refugee resettlement, the goal should not be to study “the culture of power” (Nader 1972:289) or the “the

culture of the powerless,” but to gain a sense of the numerous trajectories of power at play in encounters that are also complicated by a struggle between agency and policy.

David Mosse (2005) argues that ethnography can uncover the complex intricacies of governmentality in those spaces where policy seeks to inform practice, and where policy and practice are also shaped by those who engage in their creation and implementation. Without exploring how policy and practice are intertwined in service delivery, it is impossible to recognize why, when, and for whom service practices may be successful or unsuccessful, exploitative or empowering. While competing or even contradictory narratives of policy and organizational practice reveal the diverse subjectivities involved in service encounters, Mosse reminds us that those involved in such encounters also rely on their own interpretations to make sense of policy and of the needs or problems that inspired the creation of that policy in the first place (2005:9). Service providers shape practices based on their interpretation of how policy can best benefit recipients and translate that policy to organizational actors, as needed, to define service objectives. Service recipients, in turn, may have different interpretations of policy and practice than providers. Often the power of recipients’ to shape services is restricted unless they have the resources to change those services (or even the policy) to better meet their own needs (i.e. through feedback, a grievance process, or even participatory design). While Mosse stresses that all actors involved, even those on the receiving end of services, play a role in shaping them, there is a clear hierarchy of power from policy-maker on down to organizational directors, service providers, volunteers, and eventually recipients. While “the diversity and the multiplicity of interests (and needs to be met) itself destabilizes and militates against coherence” (Mosse 2005:9), an ethnography of such processes can show

how individual actors work to navigate service encounters and negotiate client needs within a material environment.

Individuals at the GAA, whatever their role, often did what they thought was the right thing to do (for themselves or their clients), even if they were unaware of the consequences, or even if, at first glance, their choices and actions did not seem to be in the best interest of either themselves or their clients. In a scenario where service providers seek to help refugees whose lives, language, and customs are unfamiliar, and where refugees find themselves in a foreign atmosphere, individuals easily make uninformed assumptions or misjudge how to navigate complicated encounters. By incorporating interviewing and participant observation in this study, I was also able to identify and investigate contradictions between what participants said and what they did. Anthropological exploration into the seemingly mundane interactions and dilemmas faced by GAA staff, volunteers and clients on a daily basis reveal underlying patterns and ongoing problems that affect the success of the service encounter, while uncovering practical opportunities for intervention. Through ethnography, we can understand why staff, volunteers, and clients make certain decisions in uncertain situations and how those decisions shape organizational practice. Additionally, a context-specific examination of the GAA Oakland reveals how particular nuances of practice are generated in the material environment, and how environmental conditions shape the organization's ability to provide services that are dictated by a universalized policy (which, in this case, applies to refugee resettlement anywhere in the US). Since the policy fails to take into account environmental conditions, such as job availability, resources for immigrants (such as ESL or job training), and cost of living, each site for resettlement faces particular challenges, affecting the ability of staff, volunteers and clients to achieve their desired outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Social scientists have been studying the effects of resettlement on refugees in the United States for decades. Most ethnographic studies have explored the lives and circumstances of particular ethnic populations in their years following resettlement, such as the Khmer or the Hmong (Fadiman 1997; Ong 2003). These researchers explore how service encounters negatively impact refugees' abilities to integrate into American society with a modicum of social mobility while maintaining their cultural livelihood. They identify systemic barriers (such as inadequate welfare support and the absence of culturally competent training for service providers) that marginalize refugees, and uncover how various technologies of government subject "unworthy" refugees to civilizing projects that will make them into desirable subjects of the state (Ong 2003). Research findings reveal the failure of the state to fund adequate ESL education, appropriate cultural orientation support, and suitable job skill training that would produce sufficient opportunities for the successful integration of diverse refugees. Ong (2003) links the inability of US agencies to provide satisfactory resettlement services to broader neoliberal trends in policy that push refugees toward a reliance on either the welfare state or low-skill, low-wage jobs. At the GAA in Oakland, I observed firsthand that refugees had little or no choice beyond turning to welfare or menial labor for survival. In particular, I agree with Ong that service providers must be better educated about how institutional encounters affect client outcomes, particularly in a country that is known for structural discrimination and inequality.

While undertrained service providers can hinder the resettlement process, the overarching barrier that prevents refugees from successfully integrating into their new communities is a set of policies that systematically deny them the resources to do so. The universalized policies of the US Refugee Admissions program stem from a “rational decision making model of personhood” that is “largely inattentive to the experiences, cultures and capacities of incoming refugee cohorts” (Keles 2008: 6). Refugees are not a homogenous group. Refugees from the same country are not a homogenous group. GAA clients in Oakland possess vastly different social and cultural worldviews, and economic and political experiences. Depending on their English language fluency and pre-established skill set, some are far more prepared for navigating American systems than others, and yet the policy is barely sufficient to guarantee economic security and personal safety to those who are fluent in English and are highly educated.

Until recently, most anthropological studies of refugee resettlement have focused exclusively on policy failures and the enduring effects of that policy on particular refugee populations. However, they have often failed to “study up” and explore how resettlement policies are put into practice by resettlement agencies, and why service encounters are or are not effective. By overlooking the role of the resettlement organization, a critical component of the resettlement process, conclusions about resettlement policy can be drawn, but it is impossible to identify or even explain how and why they are ineffective and problematic. This ethnography seeks to bridge the gap between policy and policy outcomes, revealing the complexity of resettlement in practice, as it occurs on the ground, where various stakeholders take action to address concrete needs.

In particular, studies that fail to explore service providers' perspectives may mischaracterize their experiences, subjectivities and motivations. When we are unable to see how resettlement caseworkers and volunteers negotiate policy and practice and why they make the decisions that they do, they often appear to be passive agents of an oppressive state regime. However, in my research, I found that this was not certainly the case. While service providers may discriminate toward their clients, act on paternalistic ignorance, and reinforce hegemonic practices that reproduce inequality, that is certainly not their goal. We are often oblivious to the ways in which racialized and imperialistic American narratives can influence our way of thinking even when we actively try to challenge and dismantle them. With education and guidance, staff and volunteers can be encouraged to think more reflexively and consciously to continue combating preconceived notions and biases regarding their clients (Erickson 2012). At the GAA in Oakland, most volunteers were very socially and culturally competent, yet incidences involving racialized assumptions or paternalistic arrogance did occur from time to time. By indentifying how volunteers can benefit from training that would improve their ability to recognize such biases, educational materials such as the Volunteer Toolkit offer the information they need to be more culturally responsive and effective overall.

Another aspect of refugee resettlement that often goes unacknowledged is the urgency that service providers experience when their organization does not have adequate funding or resources to meet their clients needs (i.e. before their R&P support is discontinued). At the GAA, as elsewhere, this often results in the dependence on volunteers to provide services that would be best offered by professionals. Even with an abundance of volunteer support, there were still days where clients in need outnumbered

service providers. I often observed or experienced this feeling of urgency as staff and volunteers scrambled to ensure their clients had the services and resources necessary simply to survive. Though staff often worked overtime and some volunteers committed three to four days a week to the GAA, they were not always able to prepare their clients for long-term financial sustainability even though this was always the main objective. In a recent article about the experience of providing social services to clients with acute needs, Brian Bophy explained,

“My take on doing work providing direct services to the poor is that you don't do it to change the world, you don't do it to make yourself feel better, and you don't do it expecting gratitude from anyone.

People do it because it needs to be done. There would be a catastrophe if local organizations didn't provide the services they do and I don't see the federal government taking any significant steps to reduce this need”(Bophy 2013).

This quote mirrors many of the testimonials staff and volunteers shared when I asked about their initial motivations for working with refugees, and how their perception of the work changed over time. Studies of refugee resettlement in the US that fail to address the complexity of provider-client service encounters may also overlook the work that providers do to undermine the negative effects of resettlement and welfare policy.

Triangulation is also necessary to provide a truly constructive analysis of refugee resettlement in the US. It is not enough to state that the detrimental outcomes refugees face following resettlement are a result of inadequate policy and insufficient funding. This statement is correct, but it must be corroborated by ethnographic evidence that

shows exactly how and why resettlement policy hinders the ability of resettlement agencies to provide effective services. Indispensable research in this area has finally begun to emerge over the past three years with studies that explore the nuances of resettlement service encounters (Erickson 2012; Nawyn 2010). These studies identify the challenges that volunteers have to contend with in serving their clients, while revealing how policy restrictions encourage resettlement organizations to prematurely push refugees into immediate self-reliance without sufficient support.

Jennifer Erickson (2012) explored service encounters between refugees and volunteers in several programs in Fargo, North Dakota. She asserts that, “by working with refugees in homes, schools, stores, social service organizations, and churches, on an everyday level, volunteers consciously and unconsciously change the ways that refugees viewed the world” (2012:167-168) as they mold refugees into ‘proper’ citizens (2012:168). Placing her study in context, volunteers in Fargo were typically elderly Protestant churchgoers who seemed to have little familiarity with or respect for the diverse backgrounds of their clients. Based on the content of her interviews with volunteers, Erickson argues that their actions and perceptions “demonstrate how civil society colludes with the state to support hegemonic notions of worthy citizenship” (2012:169). A former case manager with Lutheran Social Services, Erickson sees the unavoidable need to rely on volunteers as the biggest barrier to effective service provision. She explains, “due to a lack of accountability, training, or supervision and ever present need for more volunteers, there were few measures for screening volunteers in terms of their attitudes about race, class and gender, or culture” (174). These issues inspired her to create a training manual for volunteers at that particular organization to

better educate and prepare them to serve refugees. While Erickson sees the over-reliance on volunteers as problematic, she also recognizes that these organizations would be unable to serve their clients without volunteer labor.

In a similar study, Stephanie J. Nawyn (2010) examined the success of different types of programs provided by resettlement agencies to help refugees become integrated and self-sufficient. Looking at whether refugees were encouraged to seek job training and ESL through state welfare agencies or through specialized programs that were designed to meet refugees' particular needs, she found that programs specifically tailored to different refugee populations had the most positive impact. While larger NGOs were often more restricted in their programming, ethnic organizations often promoted opportunities for adapting traditional means of self-reliance in the American context. Programs that enable refugees to continue familiar economic practices are socially and emotionally valuable, help build community, and can be financially productive. At the GAA in the Oakland, this same logic inspired the creation of the microfinance agricultural program where clients who were farmers prior to displacement will now have an opportunity to carry on that means of livelihood. Nawyn's examination shows how some resettlement services "encompass more than social welfare assistance" (2010:153) while others simply reinforced the hegemonic marginalization that is reinforced by resettlement policy.

When I approached this project, my goal was simply to try to enhance GAA services in some way. In carrying out the research, I knew I would better understand how resettlement policy is applied in practice. What became clear almost immediately is that when policy does not supply the funding and resources required to meet its intended

goals, it cannot be put into practice in any efficient or effective manner, and those service providers who strive to carry out that policy have to be enormously dedicated to take on such an insurmountable task. As this reality began to unfold in my observations, as well as in staff, volunteer and client testimonials, I began to realize that the only way to be productive or helpful was to identify why there were significant barriers in the flow of information and how communication breakdown developed at the organizational level. While my main goal was to enhance services for clients, the best way I could do this was to make sure that volunteers who provided them with daily assistance had the knowledge and skills to effectively meet their needs. Since an intervention for volunteers appeared to be particularly crucial in light of ongoing staff transitions at the GAA, I designed the volunteer training materials in a manner I found to be most sustainable given organizational limitations. The Volunteer Toolkit has been useful not only for volunteers, but it also provides relief for staff members who know the information volunteers need is easily accessible to them.

While my research culminated in the creation of a practical intervention for the GAA, the challenges that the organization, its staff, volunteers and clients face indicate far larger problems rooted in the policy of the US Refugee Admissions Program. If academic ethnographies have little sway in changing refugee resettlement policy in the US, perhaps studies that explore how and why organizations struggle to put that policy into practice will be more impactful. Applying anthropology in more targeted efforts can uncover how the failures of policy are revealed in everyday service settings where resettlement agencies are unable to provide their client with the services they need to become genuinely self-sufficient. This ethnographic account of everyday organizational

challenges does verify the need for change at the policy level, and my findings are further substantiated by similar studies (Erickson 2012; Nawyn 2010).

While the US Government Accountability Office (2012) recently conducted a study to report on the success of the US Refugee Admissions Program for Congress, they only asked what volags, like the GAA, can do better to improve their services outcomes. They failed to address or question whether the federal policy that shapes and funds volag services is in any way sufficient for meeting the goals of the program. Although the government has overlooked many of the problems identified here, Fethi Keles argues, “anthropology can guide refugee resettlement policy toward a much-needed recognition that establishing a life and new identity in the US is as much a matter of maintaining one’s historical sense of self as it is one of adaption to psycho-social and economic challenges that lay ahead” (Keles 2008:6).

REFERENCES

- Bernard, William S.
1974 Orientation and Counseling: Their Nature and Role in the Adaptation and Integration of Permanent Immigrants. *International Migration* 12(3): 182-200.
- Bophy, Brian
2013 Social Work in the Tenderloin is not Hopeless. *Uptown Almanac*. Electronic document, <http://uptownalmanac.com/2013/03/social-work-tenderloin-not-hopeless>, accessed March 1, 2013.
- Brick, Kate, Amy Cushing-Savvi, Samia Elshafie, Alan Krill, Megan McGlynn Scanlon, and Marianne Stone.
2010 Refugee Resettlement in the United States: An Examination of Challenges and Proposed Solutions. Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs.
- Chang, Momo
2010 Still Seeking Refuge. *The East Bay Express*. Electronic document, <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/still-seeking-refuge/Content?oid=1612169>, accessed February 10, 2013.
- Chang, Momo
2012 Poverty Stricken. *The East Bay Express*. Electronic document, <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/poverty-stricken/Content?oid=3089413>, accessed February 10, 2013.
- Erickson, Jennifer
2013 Volunteering with Refugees: Neoliberalism, Hegemony, and (Senior) Citizenship. *Human Organization*: 71(2): 167-175.
- Erwin, Patricia, Yin Yan Leung, and Drina Iva Boban.
2001 Bosnian Refugees in San Francisco: A Community Assessment. A project of the Newcomers Health Program of the San Francisco Department of Public Health. Electronic document, http://www.sfdph.org/dph/files/reports/StudiesData/Misc/4_01BosAsstRpt.pdf, accessed February 28, 2012.
- Fadiman, Anne
1997 *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Gerstler-Holton, Jordan
2011 Refugees Find Oakland can be worse than Iraq. *The Chronicle*. Electronic

- document, <http://www.sfgate.com/crime/article/Refugees-find-Oakland-can-be-worse-than-Iraq-2428058.php>, accessed February 10, 2012.
- Harrison, Michael I.
2005 *Diagnosing Organizations: Methods, Models and Processes*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005.
- Heyman, Josiah McC.
2004 The Anthropology of Power-Wielding Bureaucracies. *Human Organization* 63(4): 487-500.
- Jeung, Russell, Joan Jeung, Mai Nheng Le, Grace Yoo, Amy Lam, Alisa Loveman, and Zar Ni Maung
2011 *From Crisis to Community Development: Needs and Assets of Oakland's Refugees from Burma*. Cesar Chavez Institute and Asian American Studies, San Francisco State University. Electronic Document, http://cci.sfsu.edu/files/Crisis_to_Community_Development.pdf, accessed February 1, 2013.
- Keles, Fethi
2008 The Structural Negligence of US Refugee Resettlement Policy. *Anthropology News* (49)5: 6.
- Kenny, Paul and Kate Lockwood-Kenny
2011 A Mixed Blessing: Karen Resettlement in the United States. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24(2): 217-238.
- Lewis, David
1999 Revealing, Widening, Deepening? A Review of the Existing and Potential Contribution of Anthropological Approaches to 'Third Sector' Research.' *Human Organization* 58(1): 73-81.
- Mosse, David
2005 *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London: Pluto Press.
- Nader, Laura
1972 Up the Anthropologist – Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. *In Reinventing Anthropology*. Dell H Hymes, ed. Pp 284-311. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Nader, Laura
1980 The Vertical Slice: Hierarchies and Children. *In Hierarchy and Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Bureaucracy*. Gerald M. Britan and Ronald Cohen, eds. Pp 31-42. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

Nawyn, Stephanie J.

2010 Institutional Structures of Opportunity in Refugee Resettlement: Gender, Race/ethnicity, and Refugee NGOs. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: 37(1): 149-167.

Ong, Aihwa

2003 *Buddha is Hiding*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Snyder, Mark and Allen M. Omoto

2008 Volunteerism: Social Issues Perspectives and Social Policy Implications. *Social Issues and Policy Review* 2(1):1-36.

United States Government Accountability Office

2012 Refugee Resettlement: Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholder Could Strengthen Program. Electronic document, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/592975.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2012.

United States Office of Refugee Resettlement

N.d. History. Office of Refugee Resettlement. Electronic document, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/about/history>, accessed February 15, 2012.

Global Aid Agency⁵ Oakland Office Volunteer Toolkit 2013

Global Aid Agency Oakland Office:

Hours: Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9:00am-4:00pm.
The office is closed to clients on Thursdays. Staff will be in, but they will not see clients unless they have an appointment.

⁵ Global Aid Agency is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the those involved at this resettlement organization.

GAA OAKLAND OFFICE VOLUNTEER TOOLKIT

Module 1: For ALL Volunteers

Global Aid Agency Mission Statement.....	3
Introduction.....	4
GAA Oakland Office: Staff Flow Chart.....	5
GAA Oakland Office – Programs and Volunteers Flow Chart.....	6
What Every Volunteer Should Know.....	7
I. Department Overview.....	7
Resettlement.....	7
Employment.....	7
Immigration.....	7
Development	7
II. Volunteer Programs Overview.....	7
III. GAA Clients.....	9
IV. Answering Phones.....	12
V. GAA Oakland Staff Directory.....	14
VI. Class & Drop-In Schedule.....	15
VII. Communicating with Clients – The Very Basics.....	15
VIII. Lunchtime Rotation.....	17

Module 2: Program-Specific Manuals

Duties, Responsibilities and How-Tos	
Front Desk.....	18
Resettlement	20
Health Access – see Health Access Team handbook on Z drive	
Employment – see handbook in volunteer office/on Z drive	
Family Mentor – see Mentor Program Resource Manual on Z drive	
Immigration (<i>in progress</i>)	

*Copies of the Toolkit and the Program-Specific Manuals can be found in the
Volunteer Office in print version.* **MODULE 1:**
For All GAA Oakland Volunteers

GAA Mission Statement

(Omitted to protect the anonymity of the organization)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for volunteering with the GAA in Oakland! Volunteers are an integral component of client services, and we could not do what we do without you.

The GAA Oakland office currently resettles 250 refugees per year and serves 50 asylees. In addition to general resettlement and immigration services, emerging programs at the GAA Oakland office include:

- 🕒 Health Access
- 🕒 Mental Health
- 🕒 A community gardening, nutrition, and micro-enterprise program
- 🕒 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

For the benefit of volunteers, staff and our clients, the goals of this toolkit are to:

- Orient you to the departments and services of the GAA Oakland office;
- Explain the duties and responsibilities expected for your volunteer position;
- Prepare you for your role as a volunteer **before** you start working with clients so you feel comfortable and confident assisting them; and
- Create a living document that can be easily amended because all organizations change over time.

We hope this comprehensive guide will answer many of the questions that arise throughout your time here, and if they don't, please add that information to the toolkit.

This toolkit is composed of two modules:

- 🕒 **Module 1:** provides essential information about our services and a brief review of how to work with our clients.
- 🕒 **Module 2:** is composed of separate handbooks for different volunteer positions. Here you will find an outline of your duties and responsibilities, as well as a "how-to" so that you can complete tasks easily on your own.

The GAA is a busy place, and from time to time you may be asked to assist in a role you are unfamiliar with. For that reason, each guide in Module 2 was designed to be accessible for all volunteers. At the same time, please don't hesitate to ask questions! Although the staff is busy, they greatly appreciate your help and are happy to provide guidance.

***Copies of the Toolkit can be found in the Volunteer Office, as well as
Z:\Volunteer Coordination\VOLUNTEER TOOLKIT\Volunteer Toolkit 03.29.13***

GAA Oakland Office: Staff

**GAA Oakland Office:
Programs and Volunteers**

WHAT EVERY VOLUNTEER SHOULD KNOW

I. DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Resettlement: Resettlement caseworkers serve incoming and recently resettled refugees. They secure housing and amenities before each case arrives, and assist clients in procuring services once they are here in Oakland. The resettlement department orients clients to their new environment, and assists them in learning how to navigate systems in the United States so they can become self-sufficient. The GAA provides three months of financial support and other assistance to ensure clients have: decent housing, medical care, access to necessary social services, school enrollment for children, etc.

Employment: The employment department assists clients who are seeking employment through the Matching Grant program (a financial assistance program). They offer basic training and mentoring, assistance with resumes and interviews, and weekly Job and ESL classes. The employment specialist builds working relationships with employers and businesses for the benefit of our clients. These services are offered to recently resettled refugees and asylees (who contact the GAA independently).

Immigration: While the Immigration department serves refugees and asylees, they also serve immigrants more generally. Their clients may be different than those served by Resettlement and Employment because they have been in the United States for a longer amount of time, or they may have never been served by the GAA before their current immigration needs. Immigration provides assistance in applying for Green Cards, Citizenship/Naturalization, travel documents, employment authorization, visa applications, petitioning for family reunification, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Development: Development staff and volunteers manage resources and in-kind donations, seek new donations and funding, and develop new programs. One new program under the scope of development is New Roots, a community gardening, nutrition, and micro-enterprise program.

II. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM OVERVIEW

OFFICE-WIDE

Front Desk: Front Desk volunteers are the main link connecting clients to staff. They greet clients as they arrive at the office and answer phones throughout the day. Front Desk volunteers should have a good understanding of the roles of GAA staff and volunteers in order to make sure clients are directed to the correct person for assistance. This position requires a high level of communication with clients. Front desk volunteers also serve as a liaison for dispersing messages to staff that other volunteers have taken throughout the day.

RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement/Casework: Resettlement volunteers are each assigned to a caseworker to provide her/him with direct support for refugee arrivals. Volunteers assist with apartment set-up, accompany clients to appointments, advocate for clients, provide tutorials (such as public transportation orientations), help clients get to know their new Oakland community, and maintain client casefiles.

Health Access: Health Access volunteers assist recently resettled clients in the area of healthcare. All clients must have a health screening upon arrival, and children in particular must receive immunizations in the United States. Health Access volunteers accompany clients to health screenings and other medical appointments, assist clients in choosing a medical provider, provide general health support to clients with medical concerns, and maintain their own set of client files to track medical information.

Mental Health: The Mental Health team consists of volunteers who provide assessments and referrals for clients as they are resettled. They maintain their own confidential set of files, and conduct research regarding services that might benefit our clients.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment: Employment volunteers help our clients create resumes, locate job openings, provide job training and mentorship, accompany clients to interviews and job fairs, and assist with job and ESL classes for Matching Grant clients.

ESL for Employment: ESL volunteers for employment provide weekly English classes to clients in the Matching Grant program. These classes are specifically geared to the needs of clients new to the U.S. who are seeking employment.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration: Immigration volunteers assist Immigration staff with scheduling client appointments, tracking clients, contact and communication, casefile maintenance, organizing and copying documents, and outreach.

Civics/ESL Volunteers: Civics volunteers provide support in civics class, preparing refugees, asylees and other immigrants for the naturalization/citizenship process. ESL volunteers help civics students practice reading and writing, and tutor them on the topics they need to know for the naturalization test.

DEVELOPMENT

Development/In-Kind Donation Support: Development volunteers provide direct support to the Development Manager. They assist in locating and acquiring resources, such as in-kind donations, and distribute them to our clients.

Financial Literacy: The Financial Literacy intern provides a Financial Literacy workshop for recently resettled clients. S/he can provide individualized support for clients who need to set-up up bank accounts, and provide basic banking tutorials.

Family Mentor: Family mentors are assigned to provide in-home, one-on-one assistance to a particular client or family. These volunteers provide orientation support beyond that which their caseworker can provide: they visit and socialize with clients, take families out for fun (i.e. to the library or the zoo), assist with English language learning, help children with homework, and orient clients to life and resources in Oakland.

III. GAA CLIENTS

RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement services are provided to refugees through the U.S. Reception and Placement (R&P) program. Refugees are displaced people living outside the U.S., who had to apply for refugee status through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), who make the determination overseas.

U.S. Definition for refugee from the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 101 (a) (42) (a): *“Any 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 and 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 groups, or political opinion.”*

Once refugees are admitted to the U.S. through the State Department, cases are delegated to the GAA, and GAA Headquarters decides which clients will be resettled in Oakland, based on country of origin. Since the goal is to support the cultivation of ethnic enclaves so that refugees have stronger support networks, only certain refugee populations are currently being resettled in Oakland:

Burmese: Burmese refugees arriving in the U.S. encompass a variety of ethnic groups with different languages and cultural backgrounds: Karen, Karenni (Kayah), Chin, Kachin, Rhakine (Rakhaing), Mon, and Burman, among others. They practice a variety of religions, from Buddhism and Christianity, to indigenous forms of animism. Refugees have fled from Burma over several decades for a

variety of reasons ranging from military force and oppression to displacement by one of several catastrophic natural disasters. Over the past year, most arrivals from Burma have been Karen, Kachin and Chin.

The Karen and Karenni (among other groups) have spent years to decades in Thai refugee camps after escaping through the jungles of Burma. The Thai camps offered little or no educational resources to prepare them for life in the U.S. and the Karen (as well as other refugee population who lived in Thai camps) often arrive with little to no English language proficiency. Young adults and youth may have been born in the camps.

As opposed to ending up in Thailand, it is common that Kachin and Chin refugees escaped to Malaysia where there are no refugee camps. Refugees in Malaysia are considered to be undocumented immigrants (there are no refugee camps there) and lived under the threat of legal repression. Due to UNHCR and NGO assistance in Malaysia, as well as exposure to the urban environment, many of these refugees do arrive with basic English language skills and some work experience.

Refugees from Burma have been resettled in Oakland over the past five years. Due to the growth of these distinct ethnic communities in Oakland, we now have many arrivals who have a U.S. Tie/Anchor here: a family member or friend who may assist the client/s in some way with resettlement. Many refugees who have arrived from Burma early on faced extreme barriers in Oakland, such as the inaccessibility of English language learning and job training programs, which they are still working to overcome.

Since these groups often arrive with limited (if any) English language skills, and their native languages are so rare, it can be difficult to find interpreters. Additionally, though they are from Burma, they may not speak Burmese, which is the interpretation language most available to them. Compared to other refugee populations arriving in Oakland, Burmese refugees who've been living in Thai camps often have the least amount of language and employment skills upon arrival, and have the hardest time becoming self-sufficient.

Sri Lankan: Sri Lankan refugees are generally ethnically Tamil and speak Tamil. Many of them left Sri Lanka during the Civil War that spanned from 1983 to 2009, and fled to Malaysia or Thailand, where they lived as undocumented immigrants and “urban refugees” as neither country recognizes the “refugee” distinction (Campbell Clark 2012). Most Tamils from Sri Lanka are Hindu, though some practice Christianity. Sri Lankan refugees generally arrive with minimal English language skills and some employment experience. Many have been separated from their family members and are reunified in the U.S.

Bhutanese: Most refugees from Bhutan are Lhotsampas (southerners), who are ethnically Nepalese, and Nepali speaking (Center for Applied Linguistics 2007). In response to ethnic expulsion from Bhutan in the early 1990s, they fled to Nepal where they lived in refugee camps. Refugees from Bhutan began arriving in the United States in 2006. Very few Bhutanese refugees were able attain citizenship in Nepal, so the majority spent close to two decades in the camps, and many young people were born there. Most are Hindu, but some are Buddhist or Kirat, with a small minority practicing Christianity. Like many refugee groups from Burma, there was little or no Bhutanese community in Oakland prior to resettlement. While some clients have a U.S. Tie, that individual or family may only be able to provide limited support.

Bhutanese refugees often lived among multi-generational families in the camps, so it is common that more than one generation of a family will arrive at a time (i.e. children, their parents and their grandparents), or that multi-generational families will eventually reconnect in the U.S. Most schools in the camps offered instruction in Nepali and some English, so it is common that children and teenagers speak some English, while their parents and grandparents may not. There were limited employment opportunities in the camps, although some may have work experience in farming and housekeeping. Since life is structured around the caste system, some higher caste refugees may have attended secondary school or college.

Eritrean: Although Eritrea gained independence in 1991, refugees from have been fleeing the country over the past three decades. Recent waves of refugees have fled due to an ongoing border war with Ethiopia or due to concern of mandatory “national service.” Eritreans have fled to many surrounding countries, but most recent arrivals in Oakland were living in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Tunisia, or in Malta. Most of our arrivals are single men who were separated from their families before or during displacement. Most cases, especially single men, are “free cases,” so they rarely have family in the U.S. Most Eritrean arrivals speak Tigrinya, but they may also speak Kunama, Saho, Bilen, or Arabic depending on their ethnic background and where they grew up. Most Eritreans are Muslim or Christian. Due to the range of displacement experiences, refugees from Eritrea may speak a lot or very little English. Often the younger and more recent refugees speak a lot of English because they were able to learn in school before they fled. Due to ongoing resettlement in Oakland, there is a decent sized Eritrean refugee community, so some people are able to reunite with friends here. When it comes to social and cultural norms, Eritreans are soft-spoken and may not verbally express what they need, or how they are feeling. If you are unsure of a client’s needs, or how they are doing, please ask them, but also keep respectful boundaries and don’t pry.

Iraqi: Refugees from Iraq may have fled due to: displacement and fear of persecution stemming from the U.S. invasion in 2003; from the resulting sectarian violence; or they may have applied for resettlement while in Iraq. Recent arrivals in Oakland come from Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. Some Iraqi arrivals over the past year arrived with Special Immigrant Visas, meaning the principal applicant worked with the U.S. government in some way (often as an interpreter). Iraqi refugees are primarily Arab, but some identify as Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian and Iraqi Turk. They are predominantly Muslim (Shi’i and Sunni), with 3-5% of the Iraqi population practicing other religions. Almost all Iraqi refugees speak Arabic, while Kurds and other groups may speak different languages natively (such as Kurdish).

While those who worked with the U.S. in some capacity often speak very good English, other Iraqi refugees typically have little to no experience with English. Education and employment experience among Iraqis is very similar to Americans, so Iraqi refugees often have the education and training required for basic jobs, but may not speak enough English to find jobs right away. For those who had highly skilled training and jobs in Iraq, their experience may not qualify them for the same jobs in the U.S.

Many Iraqis have very high expectations for life in America that are above and beyond the resources provided for them through the U.S. resettlement program, and this can make for a very challenging transition. Caseworkers and volunteers should be very clear about what type of assistance we can provide and what type of assistance we are unable to provide, so as to clear up any misconceptions.

Afghans: During the recent U.S. war in Afghanistan, many refugees fled to neighboring countries like Pakistan, Russia and India. While the GAA has resettled clients from these areas in the past, most Afghan arrivals over the past year received Special Immigrant Visas, meaning the principal applicant worked with or for the U.S. government in some way, often as an interpreter. Afghan refugees are very ethnically diverse and are primarily Muslim. Recent arrivals generally speak Pashto or Dari, and have varying English fluency, ranging from no English to English fluency. Almost all SIV cases have family or friends in the Bay Area. There are significant Afghan communities in Fremont, Concord and Hayward, and many families prefer to live in those communities upon arrival.

Afghan refugees often experience the same challenges as Iraqi refugees where their expectations of life in the U.S. may exceed the material provisions and support provided to them. For recent SIV cases where young men have college degrees and speak decent English, it can be difficult to find a job based on their qualifications which may result in some frustration. Caseworkers and volunteers should be very clear about what type of assistance we can provide and what type of assistance we are unable to provide, so as to clear up any misconceptions.

SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISAS: The GAA also provides reception and placement services for individuals with **Special Immigration Visas**. SIV's are being issued to Afghan and Iraqi nationals who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. government. SIV recipients will receive a green card upon their arrival, while those admitted as refugees will wait one year to apply for their green card.

For more information about resettlement client populations, check out these links:

- 🕒 Cultural Orientation Resource Center: <http://www.culturalorientation.net/>
- 🕒 EthnoMed: <http://ethnomed.org/culture>

EMPLOYMENT MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM

Most participants in the Matching Grant program are refugees who are also receiving resettlement services. However, we also accept Asylees in the Matching Grant employment program.

ASYLEES: Asylees meet the same legal definition as a refugee BUT status is conferred once the person arrives in the U.S. or at a U.S. border. Once they receive confirmation of their Asylee status from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, we can conduct an interview to see if they are a good match for the program.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration services are provided to refugees, asylees, and other immigrants from around the world. Many immigrants who come to the GAA for assistance in applying for green cards, travel documents or naturalization have been GAA clients in the past (i.e. through resettlement), but that is not a requirement. Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, we primarily serve Spanish-speaking Latino clients aged 15 to 30 who arrived in the U.S. as undocumented minors.

IV. ANSWERING PHONES

All volunteers are expected to help answer phones. The volunteer at the front desk will often be the first to answer the phone, but if the phone rings continuously that person may be busy assisting another client. Generally, a good indicator that you should grab it is if it rings more than two times.

FOR ALL MESSAGES, WRITE DOWN THE FOLLOWING ON A PINK PAD:

- 🕒 **first and last name;**
- 🕒 **phone number;**
- 🕒 **who the message is for/what is the call regarding;**
- 🕒 **date and time of call.**

If you're not sure who to direct a phone call or message to, take down a detailed message and then check in with a staff member or volunteer who may be more familiar with the services and staff.

DIRECTING CALLS:

Some of our clients speak little to no English, and phone communication can be difficult. Please be very patient, speak slowly, and do not yell into the receiver. Clients call for a variety of reasons and it is common that clients are calling to return a call/message they did not understand, and they may be unsure of who or where they're calling.

If the caller does not recognize "**GAA**," you may need to explain they are calling the "**Global Aid Agency**."

Try to **get the reason** for their call – you can ask **who** they're calling for, try **basic questions**, list some **keywords**, or ask **where they are from** to figure out why they are calling: i.e. "Who is your caseworker?" or "Is this for immigration?" or "Job?" or "Refugee?" or "Immigration?" etc. Once you figure out who or what they are calling about, you can transfer them to the appropriate staff member (see Staff Directory, page 9).

The Front Desk volunteer is the point person for all messages to staff, so if you take a message by hand, give it to the Front Desk Volunteer to pass along. **Please do not knock on a staff person's door** if their door is closed, as you may be interrupting work that requires their full attention.

HOW TO USE THE PHONE SYSTEM:

- 🕒 If the phone is ringing, pick up the receiver and say, “GAA, this is (your name here), how can I help you?”
- 🕒 To put the client on hold, push hold, and then put down the receiver or dial an extension.
- 🕒 You will know which line the call is on because the light for that line will be green. If you transfer the call, or someone picks up the line, the light will turn red.
- 🕒 Then you can do one of the following:
 - **To see if a staff member can take the call**, put the caller on hold, dial the staff member's extension, and wait for a beep. The beep signals that you are connected to their intercom. Say, for example, “Hi Zahra, Ahmed is on line 2 for you, can you take the call, or would you like me to take a message?” If you dial the extension and the staff member is clearly speaking with someone, or the extension rings busy, then click back to the line on hold and take a message on the pink pad.
 - **To transfer a call directly to the staff person**, push hold, dial their extension, and hang up the receiver. If the staff member is not there, the call will go directly to their voicemail. This is useful if the caller has a detailed or long message and seems reluctant to give you the details.
- 🕒 **To make a call** press 9 and then dial your number.

V. GAA OAKLAND STAFF DIRECTORY

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Front Desk/Reception – (ext. 1)

Executive Director – Ivan (ext. 6)

Finance Manager – Parham (ext. 2) is here on Tuesdays

Administration and Finance – Zahra (ext. 3) works under Parham and will handle most office management issues.

Resettlement Caseworkers – Fatima (ext. 5) works with clients from the Middle East and Africa; while **Clare (ext. 4)** works with clients from Sri Lanka, Burma, Bhutan, and Nepal. Case Workers also get important calls from Social Services.

Immigration – Dina and Lupe (ext. 7) are our Immigration Caseworkers who can handle most immigration questions, and can make appointments for clients to meet with Salim. You can also try an **Immigration Volunteer (ext. 8)** to see if they can help direct or take the call. You can also ask **Salim (ext. 9)** if he is available to take a call, or if he is busy take a message.

Employment Matching Grant – Alan (ext. 10) coordinates the GAA Matching Grant employment program. You can direct any job-related questions to him.

Emergencies, Asylees and Grove Foundation – Tomas (ext. 11) is the Site Supervisor. He also coordinates meetings with asylees for our Matching Grant program, and provides orientations for Grove Foundation applications.

Alameda County Intake Program – Christine (ext. 12) conducts employment and career intakes for the Alameda County Employment Services Consortium.

Development – Sara (ext. 13) meets with donors and often receives important calls from GAA Headquarters.

Mental Health – Amanda and Olga (ext. 14) meet with recently resettled refugees and translators for mental health assessments.

Volunteer & Intern Coordinator – Nicole (ext. 15) assists with volunteer and intern inquiries, as well as in-kind donations.

Volunteer Office – (ext. 16 and 17) Sometimes the caller is trying to return a call from a volunteer or intern, so you can see if that person is in the volunteer office.

VI. CLASSES AND DROP-IN SCHEDULE

THIS SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, SO PLEASE UPDATE REGULARLY

CLASSES – Held in the 4th Floor Classroom

Civics Class with Ines

Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 6:00-9:00pm

ESL for Civics Class

Tuesdays 12:30-2:30pm

Thursdays 11:00-1:00pm

Job Class with Alan/Employment

Fridays 11:00am-12:00pm

ESL for Job Class

Mondays 10:30am-12:30pm (with **David**)

Mondays 1:00pm-2:00pm (with **David**)

Tuesday 10:30am-12:30pm (with **Leslie**)

Wednesday 10:00am-12:00pm (with **Serena**)

DROP-IN APPOINTMENTS

Drop-In for Deferred Action (DACA) with Lupe

Wednesdays 2:00-5:00pm

Drop-In for Asylee Orientation with Tomas

Fridays at 10:00am

Drop-In for Grove Foundation Scholarship with Tomas

Fridays at 11:00am

VII. COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS – THE VERY BASICS*

**See Communicating With Clients in the Module 2 for Resettlement for more info.*

While some clients share information about the circumstances that left them displaced, these memories can be very painful and traumatic to recall. For this purpose, please do not ask our clients about their personal displacement experiences. Many questions about their home country or social customs are appropriate and facilitate cross-cultural learning, but please do not pry regarding someone's family, religion, or any other topic that may be considered private and/or sensitive. All client information is confidential.

Out of respect, please do not repeat the personal stories or details our clients share with you. However, if a client ever shares information that leaves you feeling concerned about their safety or well-being, or the safety and well-being of someone else, please report your concerns to the caseworker. While volunteers are here to provide guidance, assistance and advocate for GAA clients, this is to ensure our client needs are met – please do not advise them about how they should live. Clear boundaries and professionalism should always be upheld.

Accessible and respectful communication is the key to assisting GAA clients. Both the resettlement transition and the immigration process can be emotionally and physically draining, so it is important to take the initiative to communicate and converse. Recently resettled refugees, in particular, have a lot to learn over their few first months in Oakland to become self-sufficient.

Our ultimate goal is to educate clients about local services and systems so they can begin to navigate them on their own and make informed decisions. Even if you don't work directly with clients on a regular basis, you may be asked to jump in and assist when the office is busy.

Since our clients possess a range of English language skills (from none to fluency), please communicate information in detail and repeat yourself as many times as needed to relay information or instructions. One trick is to ask the client/s to communicate the information back to you so you can figure out what they do or do not understand. If you do not feel like you are able to communicate the necessary information, let the caseworker/staff person know so they can translate or locate a translator. It is always better to explain a couple times, than to assume a client understands the first time. Please note that there is no need to speak to our clients loudly: it does not improve their ability to understand what you are trying to convey.

Communication needs among clients vary considerably. Similarly, some systems, such as health care or banking, may be very familiar for clients who come from countries with similar institutions, but may be entirely unfamiliar for others. Social and cultural differences must always be taken into account to avoid miscommunication. Keep in mind we all have cultural knowledge that we unquestioningly assume is universal when it is not, so explaining instructions in full detail is important. For example, you may have a different conceptual understanding of time than the client does, so be sure to be very clear in communicating that if the client has an appointment in the United States, s/he will be expected to show up promptly at that time, or s/he may lose the appointment. See *“Cross-Culture Basics”* in the ***Mentor Program Resource Manual*** for more information on this topic, as well as tips for useful orientation topics to discuss with clients.

We expect all volunteers to maintain professional boundaries at the GAA. Our clients may not always be fully aware of the boundaries and standards you are expected to uphold, so please be sure to respond appropriately and professionally in your communication. If you are ever concerned that you or a client may have said something or acted in a way that was inappropriate, please check in with the caseworker. Due to cultural, social and religious differences, miscommunications can occur from time to time and are often easily resolved.

VIII. LUNCHTIME & ROTATING WITH FRONT DESK

Volunteers take a half-hour for lunch, between 12:00-12:30pm or 12:30-1:00pm. If you are out of the office helping volunteers or have appointments that impede with this schedule, please find a lunch time that is convenient for you.

We expect all office volunteers to take turns rotating with the Front Desk volunteer to give him/her a lunch break. We need one volunteer to sign-up each day (on the whiteboard in the volunteer office) to take a half-hour front desk shift.

MODULE 2:

Front Desk: Duties, Responsibilities and How-Tos

Front desk volunteers sit at the desk in the waiting room to answer phones and greet clients when they arrive at the office. When clients arrive or call, the goal is to determine who the client is, who the client is here to see, and what they need assistance with. To direct clients to the right person or place, front desk volunteers should be familiar with the information in **Module 1** regarding staff roles, services, and **how to answer the phone**, so please go back to review as needed.

The Waiting Room

Clients come to the GAA office for appointments, to drop-in and see their caseworker, to meet volunteers who will accompany them to appointments, to drop off documents they received in the mail, to pick up checks, to get employment assistance, etc. They also come for a variety of classes – *keep in mind*, classes take place on the 4th floor, so please show new clients how to get there.

When clients arrive, greet them and ask how you can help in order to direct them to the correct place or person. You can notify staff that their client has arrived by using the phone intercom. If the staff person is busy or has other clients in their office, you can approach them when they have finished serving their last client. If there is going to be a long wait, please let the client know.

If the client does not have an appointment, the front desk volunteer should let the staff person know that their client is here and wants to make an appointment, or see if they can drop-in. Volunteers may also be able to assist if you cannot locate the right staff person. For example, a client may say they're here to see the Employment Specialist when they are actually scheduled to meet with an employment volunteer to work on a resume, or the client may have a simple question that a resettlement volunteer can answer. If the staff person is out, or cannot see the client, the front desk volunteer can leave a message on the staff person's desk/door. You will serve as the main liaison between clients and staff.

The waiting room can get very busy, and there may be several clients waiting to see a single staff person. The Front Desk volunteer should keep track of who is in the office, who they are here to see, and in what order drop-in's arrived. If clients are waiting for a class, keep an eye on the time and direct them to the classroom before it begins.

This is also a great time to talk with clients. If this is someone's first visit to the office, show them the bathroom key, and let them know how to get to the restroom. You can engage in discussion and help clients practice English. If the client is interested in striking up a conversation, talk about life in the U.S. and see if they have any questions about Oakland. At the same time, clients may prefer not to engage in conversation, so please be mindful. In the waiting room, we have basic English flashcards (with terms and pictures), guides

about U.S. resettlement (in a variety of languages), and maps of Oakland, as well as other information about our services that may be beneficial for clients to know about. There are also toys for kids.

If anyone comes to the office and is upset, has an urgent matter, or has logistical questions, these issues are best left to the caseworker/staff they've been working with. Alert the staff as soon as you can, and reassure the client while they wait that the staff will accommodate them to the best of their ability. Sometimes it's helpful to lighten the mood and offer a little distraction until they can be helped – talk about the weather, or ask what they've been up to lately. Please remember that volunteers are not here to give advice, but to serve as a resource in advocating for the client.

Mail and Packages

Please give all mail and packages to the Administration and Finance manager. S/he must check-in all mail/packages before they are dispersed to staff.

Answering Phones

See the **Answering Phones** section in Module 1 of the Toolkit. The Front Desk Volunteer is the primary person who answers the phone. However, other volunteers and staff will help out, so if you are already assisting a client, someone else in the back will answer the phone.

FOR MONDAY AND FRIDAY FRONT DESK VOLUNTEERS:

The phone automatically reverts to message-only mode on Thursdays (i.e. no calls will come through) and over the weekend. When you come in on **Monday and Friday mornings, please select the “day” button** on the front desk phone so that calls ring into the office.

MODULE 2:

Resettlement: Duties & Responsibilities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESETTLEMENT OVERVIEW

Resettlement Timeline.....	21
Types of Cases – Free and U.S. Tie.....	22
Matching Grant.....	22
COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS – FOR RESETTLEMENT.....	22
CASEFILE TIMELOG.....	26

RESETTLEMENT HOW-TOs

Building A Casefile.....	27
Request a Health Screening.....	28
PG&E.....	28
AT&T.....	29
Apartment Set-Up and Shopping.....	29
Bus Ticket.....	29
Instructions for Completing Standardized Forms	29
First Visit to GAA.....	29
Bus Orientation.....	30
Copying Client Documents.....	30
What is the I-94?.....	30
Applying for a Social Security Card.....	30
Applying for Social Services and Follow-Up.....	31
Creating a Bank Account.....	33
Selective Service.....	34
Client Mail.....	34
Picking Up Checks.....	35
Applying for California ID at the DMV.....	35
Medical Appointments and Immunizations.....	36

School Enrollment for K-12.....	36
Applying for SSI/Disability.....	37
Using the Online Database and Entering Case Notes.....	38
Casefile Maintenance.....	39
Resettlement Plans and Non-Employable Resettlement Plans.....	39
Budgets.....	41
Money Sheet and Vouchers.....	41
WIC – Women, Infants and Children.....	41
Other Important Information.....	42
Glossary and Acronyms.....	42
Important Phone Numbers.....	43
APPENDIX A: Casefile Order.....	omitted
APPENDIX B: Case Note Checklist.....	omitted
APPENDIX C: Social Security Application Sample.....	omitted
APPENDIX D: AR-11 Sample.....	omitted
APPENDIX E: Budget Cheat Sheet.....	omitted

RESETTLEMENT OVERVIEW

Resettlement volunteers assist caseworkers in the resettlement of newly arrived refugees. For their arrival, caseworkers must ensure that all clients have shelter, groceries, a hot meal, phone and PG&E, and have arranged for someone (i.e. the caseworker or a US tie) to pick them up from the airport and take them to their new home. Caseworkers provide a basic orientation to help clients learn how to navigate their new environment, and volunteers may assist in some areas, such as showing clients how to take the bus. Each volunteer will have an assigned caseworker, but you may be asked to assist other caseworkers from time to time as well. Each caseworker resettles clients from particular countries, and clients have varying levels of English language skill, ranging from no English to English fluency.

Following arrival, each client is provided a Reception & Placement payment, and this money covers their first month's worth of expenses. It is up to the caseworkers and their volunteers to assist clients in applying for the aid and training they will need to gain self sufficiency in Oakland over the first 3 months following their arrival.

Resettlement volunteers assist caseworkers in arrival preparation, completing applications and forms, entering casenotes, accompanying clients to appointments, and other general assistance as needed.

Frequent responsibilities include:

- ⌚ Apartment set-up and arrival preparations
- ⌚ accompanying clients at Social Security and Social Services and completing corresponding forms
- ⌚ assisting clients in signing up for a bank account
- ⌚ enrolling children in school
- ⌚ introducing clients to American society and the Oakland community
- ⌚ building and maintaining casefiles
- ⌚ entering casenotes in the online database

Resettlement Timeline – Volunteer Duties

Pre-arrival:

- Build casefile
- Request health screening at Refugee Clinic
- Set-up AT&T and PG&E (if applicable)

- Assist in apartment set-up and purchase of groceries and/or bus ticket
- Complete forms prior to client arrival:
 - o Social Security application
 - o AR-11 (Change of Address)
 - o Social Services Applications (Food Stamps & Medi-Cal **or** CalWORKS → *this may be completed later if the caseworker has to meet the client to determine if they will receive cash assistance through the Matching Grant program or social services*)

Day/s after arrival:

- Either the client/s will come to office, or the volunteer will pick the client/s up at home and show them how to come to the GAA on the bus. Clients must bring their IOM bag with all of their documents.
- Copy IOM bag documents: 3 copies of I-94 (2 for us, 1 for client), promissory note, passport (if they have one), medical documents, and stamped assurance.
- Clients should sign forms for services they are applying for.
- Apply for Social Security card
- Apply for Social Services
- Assist client/s at bank to set-up account and cash check (*this may be done by Financial Literacy intern*)

Following Days and Weeks:

- Accompany client to any follow-up appointments at Social Services or Social Security
- Make sure to communicate with Health Access team to let them know when clients have medical appointments (*Health Access volunteers will assist client to Refugee Clinic*)
- Assist in enrolling kids in school
- Accompany clients to DMV to apply for CA ID card
- Assist caseworkers when clients come to the office (i.e. with mail, questions, etc.)
- Enter casenotes as applicable and assist in finalizing casefiles.

Types of Cases

Cases may represent one individual who is being resettled, or an entire family. Sometimes we have several cases, representing an extended family.

Free Case: The client/s is arriving on his/her/their own and does not have a relative or friend in the area to help assist with resettlement. The GAA will take care of **all** resettlement needs.

U.S. Tie/Anchor: A US Tie/anchor is a relative or friend of the client and will be able to assist in some capacity with resettlement. *You can determine if a case is a Free Case or U.S. Tie because it will be noted on their casefile, and on their case face sheet.*

Matching Grant Employment Program

The GAA has a matching grant program that provides some clients with employment assistance. Each client's caseworker will decide if s/he is eligible for the program. If applicable, the GAA will provide financial assistance to the client until s/he is able to find a job, within 120 to 180 days of arrival. If the client is not eligible for the matching grant program, s/he will apply for CalWORKS through Social Services, to get Refugee Cash Assistance and employment assistance through the state.

COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS – FOR RESETTLEMENT

While some clients share information about the circumstances that left them displaced, these memories can be very painful and traumatic to recall. For this purpose, *please do not ask our clients about their personal displacement experiences*. Many questions about their home country or social customs are appropriate and facilitate cross-cultural learning, but please do not pry regarding someone's family, religion, or any other topic that may be considered private and/or sensitive. All client information is confidential.

Out of respect, please do not repeat the personal stories or details our clients share with you. However, if a client ever shares information that leaves you feeling concerned about their safety or well-being, or the safety and well-being of someone else, please report your concerns to the caseworker. While volunteers are here to provide guidance, assistance and advocate for GAA clients, this is to ensure our client needs are met – please do not advise them about how they should live. Clear boundaries and professionalism should always be upheld.

Accessible and respectful communication is the key to assisting GAA clients. Both the resettlement transition and the immigration process can be emotionally and physically draining, so it is important to take the initiative to communicate and converse. Recently resettled refugees, in particular, have a lot to learn over their few first months in Oakland to become self-sufficient.

Our ultimate goal is to educate clients about local services and systems so they can begin to navigate them on their own and make informed decisions. Even if you don't work directly with clients on a regular basis, you may be asked to jump in and assist when the office is busy.

Since our clients possess a range of English language skills (from none to fluency), please communicate information in detail and repeat yourself as many times as needed to relay information or instructions. One trick is to ask the client/s to communicate the information back to you so you can figure out what they do or do not understand. If you do not feel like you are able to communicate the necessary information, let the caseworker/staff person know so they can translate or locate a translator. It is always better to explain a couple times, than to assume a client understands the first time. Please note that there is no need to speak to our clients loudly: it does not improve their ability to understand what you are trying to convey.

Communication needs among clients vary considerably. Similarly, some systems, such as health care or banking, may be very familiar for clients who come from countries with similar institutions, but may be entirely unfamiliar for others. Social and cultural differences must always be taken into account to avoid miscommunication. Keep in mind we all have cultural knowledge that we unquestioningly assume is universal when it is not, so explaining instructions in full detail is important. For example, you may have a different conceptual understanding of time than the client does, so be sure to be very clear in communicating that if the client has an appointment in the United States, s/he will be expected to show up promptly at that time, or s/he may lose the appointment. See *“Cross-Culture Basics” in the Mentor Program Resource Manual* for more information on this topic, as well as tips for useful orientation topics to discuss with clients.

We expect all volunteers to maintain professional boundaries at the GAA. Our clients may not always be fully aware of the boundaries and standards you are expected to uphold, so please be sure to respond appropriately and professionally in your communication. If you are ever concerned that you or a client may have said something or acted in a way that was inappropriate, please check in with the caseworker. Due to cultural, social and religious differences, miscommunications can occur from time to time and are often easily resolved.

Breaking the ice: Always introduce yourself to clients when you work with them, and ask for their name/s. Sometimes the language barrier is extreme, and the client (or even you) may feel awkward or self-conscious about the ability/inability to communicate. For all of our services, communication is necessary, so it is best to jump right in, even if you start slow. Since your ability to converse with a client may be limited, you can also rely on non-verbal cues to aid in communication, such as facial expressions. Smiling is important. 😊

Ideas for icebreakers:

- 🕒 Practice pronouncing each other’s names
- 🕒 Practice language together – teach the client some basic words or phrases in English, and ask how to say those things in their language. This shows the client that you are not simply doing a job, but that you are generally interested in learning about

them. Talk about the weather – often our clients don't know what to expect about weather in Oakland and it is very different than where they come from. Ask if they have a warm jacket, and if not, let the caseworker know.

- 🕒 If the client has children, greet the kids as well. People are always happy to talk about their children.
- 🕒 Talk about food – everyone eats!
- 🕒 **See “Orienting Clients” below**

Time spent with clients: It is not uncommon to spend hours waiting with clients during their first weeks here. Upon arrival, clients can be overwhelmed by their new surroundings. They are not always comfortable asking questions, or may not know the right questions to ask. For this reason, time spent waiting is a prime opportunity to check in with clients to see:

- 🕒 If they have any questions you can answer, or that need to be directed to their caseworker.
- 🕒 To explain the purpose of the application/service/appointment (you are waiting for), and how the process works, so they can do it on their own in the future
- 🕒 To enhance the learning and orientation process (i.e. practicing English, discussing how to navigate American bureaucratic systems, etc.)

While communication is important, it should not be forced. If a client seems uncomfortable when you engage him/her, it is ok to let the conversation rest so they can work through their thoughts on their own. Similarly, if someone seems uncomfortable or agitated, try to find a way to make light of the situation or change the subject. As volunteers, we don't have all the answers, so it is important to stay positive and be encouraging.

Explain what you are doing: Always keep clients informed to the best of your ability about the purpose of what you are doing, and how you are doing it (*i.e.* if you are applying for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal, explain what those services are; **Or** if you are picking up an EBT card, show them how to use it).

Answering Questions: When a client has a question, you have to determine if it is a question you can answer, or if it is a question you should refer to the caseworker. Caseworkers will always be best suited to answer client questions, but they may be too busy dealing with serious logistics to get to some of the basics. For example, if a client has a question about how to fill a prescription at the pharmacy, or how send a letter by mail, a volunteer can certainly explain how to do this. Basic questions about how systems in the United States work (like schools or jobs) are good topics for discussion. Logistical questions, however, should always be referred to the caseworker. For example, if a client tells you that s/he is unhappy with their living situation, or doesn't have enough money to buy food, let them know they should contact their caseworker as soon as possible. If the matter is urgent, you should pass along the question or concern to the caseworker to give them a head's up.

Orienting Clients to Oakland and other Helpful Activities/Conversations: Although caseworkers provide an orientation for clients, there are many basic topics that volunteers can discuss with clients during the time we spend waiting together:

- 🕒 **Traffic lights and symbols.**
- 🕒 Explain the first name/last name classification used here.
- 🕒 Learning United States **bills and coins** (pictures are better than actual cash). You can always bring up photos on your phone, or print images at the GAA office to use.
- 🕒 **Navigating a map:** There are hand-drawn maps at the GAA, and bus maps of Oakland are available at AC Transit. You can bring these with you if you are in the field with clients. Wherever you are, you can pull out the map, explain how to use it, discuss where you are and where important landmarks are (i.e. like the GAA office, the client's home, the local library, Highland hospital, etc.).
- 🕒 **Community resources:** Tell our clients about community resources such as the library. In addition to books, the library also offers activities for kids, and provides internet access for free.
- 🕒 **Personal Safety:** While you do not want to alarm or concern clients, Oakland can be a rough city. It is important our clients are familiar with basic safety practices: be alert when you are walking down the street, always keep your money in a secure place that is hidden from sight, be aware of where you walk at night, do not let strangers in your house, who you should ask for help if you get lost, how to keep children safe, etc. If you pass a police car, or ambulance while walking, you can explain what they are and discuss the different types of emergency services.
- 🕒 **How to shop:** Practice shopping scenarios verbally. For example, you can pretend to be a cashier or a banker and help the client practice communicating as a customer. You can also practice how to clear up common conversational miscommunication.
- 🕒 **For kids:** Help the kids learn colors, numbers, and the ABC's. Identify the names of things you pass on the street (i.e. car, red light, green light, etc.).
- 🕒 **Housing and Utilities:** Help clients learn about the types of problems for which they might need to contact their building manager, or PG&E. Discuss housing safety (i.e. turning off the stove after use, keeping doors and windows locked while sleeping or away). Explain various scenarios and how they can be handled.
- 🕒 **Education:** What is education like in the U.S.? How can parents communicate with the schools or their child's teacher? What is appropriate communication? What is expected of parents in terms of helping their children? If children are struggling, we can help them find tutors. For adults, you can discuss ESL classes, the importance of a high school diploma (or equivalent), the structure of college and/or vocational training programs.

- 🕒 **Jobs:** What are jobs like in the U.S.? What is generally expected of employees (i.e. expectations around timeliness and sick days, etc.)? What are the English names for the types of work clients have done in the past?
- 🕒 You can also find a **great list of orientation topics**, along with sample questions and scenarios in the ***Mentor Program Resource Manual***: housing; clothing; education; food and nutrition; healthcare; transportation; holidays and customs; families and children' and employment.
- 🕒 ***Please also take a look around the volunteer office to see if there are any handouts you can bring with you in the field (i.e. maps, ESL practice, etc.)!***

If someone is overwhelmed or upset: The resettlement process can be very difficult. Particularly when there are communication barriers, clients can feel confused or frustrated about what is going on in a given situation. As a volunteer, you may not have the information they are looking for, or you may not know what to say to explain what is happening. If a client is upset: reassure them that you understand there is a problem; explain that you will alert a GAA staff person as soon as you can and that the client should contact their caseworker. Try to find a way to deescalate the situation. If it seems appropriate, lighten the mood and change the topic of conversation, or divert attention to something else. Sometimes a client may need to take a couple minutes to relax. Always respect the client's space, and make sure that you are not reacting negatively. If you are feeling stressed out about a situation, the client may react accordingly. Try to remain calm, and you can always call the GAA to have a staff person advise you. Often complications are beyond the control of the volunteer, so you are the best source for remaining positive, reassuring the client that everything is ok, and advocating for their needs.

Cross-Cultural Communication = Co-Learning

One of the best ways to begin conversing with clients is to create a co-learning environment. If you show that you are interested in learning about their lives and cultures, while you teach them about systems and life ways in the United States, you help clients feel comfortable by validating their knowledge, experience and perspective. Cross-cultural comparison is a beneficial way for clients to learn and will also teach you how to work better with and understand the clients you serve. For more information on this topic, see "Cross-Culture Basics" in the ***Mentor Program Resource Manual*** for more information.

CASEFILE TIMELOG

Volunteers are asked to **track and record the amount of time spent each day on administrative/casework**. You will find a **Casefile Timelog** in the volunteer office to fill out each day you come into the GAA. Again, this is to track casework/administrative work only (i.e. not work in the field). **For each hour you work, we receive \$24 from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.**

RESETTLEMENT HOW-TOS

Building a Casefile

All casefiles have a particular order for documentation. Find the “**Casefile Order**” document in the volunteer office to learn the order and the “**Case Notes Checklist**” (also found in the volunteer office). Almost all case information will be filed on the right side of the file, while all receipts and vouchers will go on the left. There are two sample casefiles in the volunteer office: one for refugees, and one for asylees.

Casefiles folders are located in the supplies cabinet, and are color-coded depending on the origin of the client:

- 🕒 Green – African clients
- 🕒 Orange – Burmese and Sri Lankan clients
- 🕒 Yellow – Bhutanese clients
- 🕒 Manila – Middle Eastern clients
- 🕒 Red/Pink – Asylees

Label casefiles with:

<u>LAST NAME, First Name</u>	<u>Family Size</u>	<u>Case #</u>	<u>Date of Arrival</u>
AWNG, Mun	F. 3	TH-#####	12/02/2012

Casefile documents will mainly be found in the Online Database.

- 🕒 **Logging on to the database:** Using Internet Explorer, go to: (*omitted*). Login information and passwords are located on the whiteboard in the volunteer office.

REFUGEE Casefiles - Print forms from the Database to place in the case file:

- 🕒 Find the client by doing a search under “View RP Cases”
- 🕒 Choose the “Case Notes” tab
- 🕒 Click on “Print Forms” and select the following to print:
 - 5 Day Home Visit Checklist
 - 30 Day Home Visit Checklist
 - Close-Out Checklist

- Core Services Checklist
- Home Safety Checklist
- Non-Employable Resettlement Plan
- Orientation Checklist
- Resettlement-Employment Plan (check adults only)
- Supply List
- ⌚ Choose “Assurance” tab
 - Print VOP (for clients with US Ties only)
 - Print Assurance
- ⌚ If there is no Assurance, go back to “Case Notes” tab and choose “Print Face Sheet”
- ⌚ In the volunteer office, pull a blank “Client Release Form” and “Budget” from the packets on the wall in the volunteer office to include in the file.
- ⌚ See the **Casefile Order** document in the volunteer office to figure out which order the documents go in.
- ⌚ Other documents will be photocopied and added upon/after client arrival.
- ⌚ **Note:** The biodata should also be printed for all new cases. Due to confidentiality, only caseworkers can print the full biodata with medical information, so please leave a reminder in the file.

ASYLEE Casefiles - *Print forms from Database to place in the case file:*

- ⌚ Copy all Asylee documents: Asylum Approval letter from U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, passport, I-94, social security card, and signed Matching Grant Agreement, Assessment and Client Rights and Responsibilities forms.
- ⌚ Find the client by doing a search under “View MG Cases”
- ⌚ Choose the “Case Notes” tab
- ⌚ Click on “Print Face Sheet”
- ⌚ Over time, add vouchers, money sheet, casenotes, Social Services correspondence, and 120-Day Status Report

Request a Health Screening

As requested by the caseworker, fill out a fax cover sheet for Diane at the Refugee Clinic to request a health screening for all incoming arrivals. List each case as follows:

Last name, First initial. Family size, Speaks LANGUAGE

i.e. Kyi, A. F. 3, Speaks Karen
Ahmed, M. F. 1, Speaks Arabic

Along with the fax cover sheet, include the case face sheet (for each case), as well as any pertinent biodata (for individuals whose biodata lists health issues).

Fax the documents to Diane, and make a copy of the fax cover sheet for each client's casefile. Be sure to black-out the names of other clients on the fax sheet for confidentiality.

Notify the Health Access Team of all appointments once they are scheduled. Ideally volunteers from the Health Access Team will be able to accompany clients to their Health Intake and Screening at Refugee Clinic, but if they are unavailable, Resettlement volunteers may assist.

PG&E

PG&E must be set up for the client/s arrival day. To set-up a new account, call PG&E at 1-800-743-5000. Ask your caseworker how to do this before you call, and make sure the customer services representative knows the client is eligible for the *CARE* program for discounted service.

If a client has to make account changes or report a problem, PG&E does provide interpreters for many languages.

AT&T

AT&T should also be set-up for client arrival. **Ask the caseworker for specific instructions on how to do this before you call.** To set up phone service, call **1-800-288-2020**. You will need a \$50 debit gift from the caseworker to pay for the deposit over the phone. *Sometimes the debit cards are hard to use, so ask the caseworker which information AT&T will need.* Request an application for **Lifeline** because the client is eligible for discounted service. AT&T will try to sell you extra services, but you want to order local service only. To reach Tech Support, dial **1-866-346-1168** and dial 0 when the phone message starts.

Apartment Set-Up and Shopping

The caseworker may ask for your assistance in shopping for furniture and supplies, and setting up the apartment. We have a set list of supplies that all of our clients need. Sometimes we have extra supplies in storage or donated supplies to pull from.

Bus Ticket

We purchase all clients a bus ticket prior to their arrival so they are prepared for their first day in Oakland. Monthly passes and clipper cards (the caseworker will tell you which to buy) can be purchased at the AC Transit Customer Service Center located at 1600 Franklin Street between 16th and 17th. Be sure to ask for a bus system map to give each family or adult.

Instructions for Completing Standardized Forms:

- ⌚ **Social Security application:** See sample in volunteer office
- ⌚ **AR-11:** See sample in volunteer office
- ⌚ **Food Stamps Application** (for *Matching Grant clients*): See sample in volunteer office*
- ⌚ **Medi-Cal Application** (for *Matching Grant clients*): See sample in volunteer office*
- ⌚ **CalWORKS Application** (for *clients who won't be on Matching Grant*): See sample in volunteer office*

For all social services applications, be mindful of whether this is a first time application, **or if this is for a client/s who already applied for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal and is now applying for CalWORKS – this may affect how you answer the questions.*

First Visit to GAA

The client/s will generally come to the GAA office the day after arrival. At that time we will assist them in applying for Social Security and Social Services (either Medi-Cal and Food Stamps, or CalWORKS), and accompany them to Wells Fargo to set-up a bank account so they can cash their first check.

Bus Orientation

After a client's arrival, you may be asked to pick them up at home and bring them back to the GAA. No matter their level of English fluency, make sure they know which bus to take, as well as where to catch to bus to come to the GAA, and where to catch the bus when they go home. You can also point out important streets and landmarks to help them remember. Be mindful not to overwhelm the client,

but you do want to make sure they learn how to get to the GAA, and how to get home. They will make this trip quite frequently over their first weeks here. If this is **your** first time on AC transit, just ask the bus driver for assistance with any questions you have.

You can go to <http://511.org/> to figure out which bus to take to their house, which bus to take them home, and where to catch the bus. If you are asked to accompany a client on the bus, the GAA will reimburse you.

Copying Client Documents

When clients arrive at the GAA for the first time, they will bring their IOM (International Office of Migration) bag. The IOM Bag should have the client's I-94, promissory note, customs declaration forms, medical forms and x-rays, passports (if they have one), and any other resettlement documents.

Make the following copies and place them in the casefile:

- ⌚ 3 copies of I-94 (2 for us, give 1 copy to client)
- ⌚ photo documentation attached to I-94 cards
- ⌚ promissory note
- ⌚ passport (if they have one – most clients do not)
- ⌚ medical documents
- ⌚ stamped assurance

What is the I-94?

Upon entry in the U.S., refugees are given an I-94 card, with a stamp noting their date of entry. This is the most important document our clients have when they arrive.

The I-94 card has a seven-digit number that is also known as the “Alien Registration Number.” The I-94 will be used as an initial ID in applying for Social Security, Social Services, a bank account, etc. The I-94 also indicates a refugee's right to work in the United States, although they will also need an Employment Authorization Card.

Applying for a Social Security Card

When clients arrive at the office to go to social security, help them complete any blanks on the Social Security card application:

- 🕒 City of birth
- 🕒 Mothers name
- 🕒 Fathers name
- 🕒 Sign and Date

Before you leave the office, place a signed **copy** of the application in the casefile. All applicants must bring their **I-94** to apply. **Only** adults and parents will apply upon arrival; children must wait until a parent receives her/his card to apply. When applying for children, all children must be present, along with one parent who has their social security card already.

The Social Security office is located at 360 22nd Street, 4th floor, between Franklin and Webster, within walking distance from the GAA. Please note that Social Security staff will ask the client/s if this is the first time they've been to the United States, and if this is the first time they've applied for a social security card. Depending on their English fluency, you may have to help them answer these questions, or you can request that they call an interpreter to translate.

After the application is complete, they will give you a receipt. Make a **copy** of the receipt for the casefile, and give the client the original.

The Social Security card should arrive in two to four weeks. Once the card arrives, the caseworker will have the client come in to sign the card, and will make a copy for the casefile (before giving the card to the client). We will fax the social security card number to the caseworker at Social Services, and please ask the client to take their card to Anita at Wells Fargo. She will need their SSN for their bank accounts.

Applying for Social Services and Follow-Up

Since clients apply for Social Services around the same time that they are applying for Social Security, inform the intake person that the applicant is refugee and has an I-94 number. Tell them that the client has applied for their Social Security card, but it will take 2-4 weeks to arrive. Once the clients Social Security card arrives, the caseworker will send a copy to Social Services.

About Social Services for GAA clients: Since clients generally have no money, we help them apply for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal. The caseworker will determine if the client is eligible for Matching Grant, and will instruct you, accordingly, on which forms to complete for each case.

If clients are eligible for the Matching Grant program, they will receive cash assistance through that program for up to 4 months. **Fill out the Medi-Cal and Food Stamps applications for newly arrived clients ONLY if they ARE eligible for Matching Grant, otherwise complete the CalWORKS form only.** If they are not eligible for Matching Grant, then they will apply for the CalWORKS program, through which they will receive Food Stamps, Medi-Cal and Refugee Cash Assistance.

Explain to the client what service/s they're applying for:

- 🕒 **Food Stamps:** Food stamps come in the form of an EBT card, which works like a credit card. Clients can use the card to purchase food at any store that takes EBT (look for the  mark logo). Depending on their financial need, a limited amount of money will be added to the card each month.
- 🕒 **Medi-Cal:** Medi-Cal is a CA's Medicaid program, and provides our clients with public health insurance. Once approved, the client will receive a Benefits I.D. Card, and can apply for a general provider (Health Access Team will help with selecting a provider).
- 🕒 **CalWORKS/Refugee Cash Assistance:** Refugee Cash Assistance is available through Social Services for up to 8 months after a client's arrival. Just as Food Stamps and Medi-Cal provide financing for food and healthcare, clients need their RCA money to help pay their rent, phone and PG&E expenses. Clients receiving RCA will be required to follow up on relevant job training or employment programs through Social Services. RCA funds are also added to the client's EBT card.

Taking Clients to Social Services

Social Services is located at 2000 San Pablo Avenue at 20th Street within walking distance. Depending on the client's English fluency, you may have to help them answer questions, or you can request that they call an interpreter to translate depending on what language/s they do speak.

→ **If the client is submitting an application, or picking up an EBT card**, get in line behind the desk right inside the front door (to the left) to get a number for intake.

Submitting applications: The client will need their I-94 to submit applications. Once an application is submitted, the client will receive follow-up instructions by mail or phone.

Picking up an EBT card: If you are picking up an EBT card at Social Services, the client must bring a photo ID, such as the EAD card. Please ask them to activate the card for the client. The client will need to choose a **4-digit pin** for the card. If the client has already received their SSN and it has been submitted to Social Services by the caseworker, then you can also set-up an EBT card over the phone and the client must choose a pin at that time.

→ **If the client has an appointment to meet a worker**, you can go straight to the room listed on the client's appointment confirmation.

Application follow-up: After you submit the application with an intake worker, the client will be contacted by mail or phone to come back to social services to meet with a social worker. We accompany clients to these appointments. If the client is applying for **CalWORKS** they will meet with an employment worker, in addition to their social worker, and will have to have their fingerprints and photo taken. The social worker will give instructions on where to go to do this.

Copy Social Service documents for the casefile, such as receipts, or appointment follow-up information. There is a copy machine on the first floor of social services that you or the client can use anytime. Make 1 **copy** of the client's **EBT** card, and make 2 **copies** of the **Benefits ID** card (1 for the casefile and 1 for the Health Access Team's client files) when they arrive. Remind clients to keep their BIC card with them (i.e. in a wallet) in case of an emergency.

Once clients receive their EBT card, please provide a tutorial/orientation so they can learn how to use it to purchase food, and/or how to access cash benefits if they are on CalWORKS/RCA.

🕒 **Using the EBT card for food stamps:** The EBT card with food stamps can be used at any market with the  mark logo, but it is best to go into the store and ask if they use EBT. To use the card, clients should go up to the cashier with their groceries, swipe their card through the Point-Of-Sale terminal or give the cashier the card. There will be a prompt to enter the 4-digit pin, and then press enter. Also show the client how to call (877) 328-9677 to figure out their food stamps balance before they shop. The balance will also be indicated on their last receipt.

🕒 **Using the EBT card to access cash benefits:** If clients are receiving RCA/CalWORKS, then their cash benefits will be added to their EBT card. To access cash, they can withdraw money from any ATM or store with the  mark logo, or purchase items directly with their cash benefits. **Please note** that most ATM's (including Wells Fargo where our clients have bank accounts) will charge a surcharge fee of up to \$5, however there are ATM's that do not charge these fees. The closest surcharge-free ATM to the GAA office is the One California Bank ATM on Webster between 14th and 15th, or the MoneyPass  ATM at Walgreens

on the corner of 14th and Broadway. You can also search for the closest MoneyPass ATM (these are surcharge free) to the client's house here: <http://www.moneypass.com/atm-locator.aspx>. Clients can also sign-up for direct deposit by calling (888) 999-4772.

To check the status of a client's Food Stamps, Medi-Cal or CalWORKS, you can call (510)263-2420 or (888)999-4772 (or go online at <https://alamedasocialservices.org/public/services/carsvru/carsweb.htm>) and enter their Social Security Number. If you have the 16-digit EBT card number, you can call (877) 328-9677 (or go online at www.ebt.ca.gov) to check the food stamp and/or cash benefits balance.

Contacting a worker: If you need to get in touch with a worker and you do not have their number, call Social Services Central Index at (510)268-2002 with: 1) either the workers name and worker number; 2) or the clients name, SSN (or I-94) and DOB.

Creating a Bank Account

(If the financial literacy intern is in, s/he can assist with this as well.)

Once clients arrive, the GAA gives them a check so they have pocket money for food. During their first trip to the office, the client should see their caseworker and sign the voucher to get their check.

Once they have the check, you can take the client to the Wells Fargo Bank at 12th and Broadway to open an account. Anita, the bank branch vice president, assists our clients. She will start a checking and savings account for them, and will give them a small withdrawal of cash from their check so they have money for food. The client will also receive a folder with blank checks and bank account information.

To start the account, the client will need: I-94, home address, email address (optional), and s/he will need to choose a 4-digit pin number.

Until they receive their debit card in the mail (couple weeks at most), they can bring their I-94 to the bank, along with their bank account information to make deposits or withdrawals.

These accounts are fee-free for the first three months, after which they will be subject to a monthly fee. However, if clients use their debit card at the store to purchase something 10 times per month, they will not be charged the monthly service fee. **Be sure to communicate to clients that:** they should use their debit card for a small purchase 10 times per month to avoid the monthly fee, and explain that they must be aware of their bank balance to avoid overdraft fees.

Once clients receive their card in the mail, they should bring it to the GAA. If the financial literacy intern is present, s/he should take the client/s to the atm to show them how it works. If not, a resettlement volunteer should do this. Also explain/show how to use the debit card to make purchases at the store (i.e. choose debit, and use the pin).

Contacting the bank:

Well Fargo Contact: Anita Wilson, *(number omitted)*

Local Branch General line: *(number omitted)*

Selective Services

All men between the ages of 18 and 25 must complete the Selective Service form to register under the U.S. Armed Forces. Clients must have a social security number to complete the form. Registration does not mean anyone is actually applying or volunteering to join the Armed Forces, this is simply a legal requirement in the event there was ever a draft.

Client Mail

The caseworkers will explain to new clients that they should bring in any mail they receive so that the caseworker can assist them in responding, or make a copy for their file. Please remind clients of this, especially if they are applying or signing up for something for which they will receive important mail. For example, if you are applying for Social Services, remind the client that they will receive follow-up instructions in the mail, and must bring those documents to the GAA. ***Any mail that requires follow-up, such as a Social Services form, should go to the caseworker. Important documents that don't require follow-up, such as a Food Stamps statement or Social Security receipt, can be copied and placed in the casefile.*** While most mail will go to the caseworker, almost all medical documents, such as Medi-Cal Choice forms and bills should be placed in the Health Access Team's intake folder so they can follow-up.

We will also receive mail for clients at the GAA, such as Social Security and EAD cards, which should be copied (after they're signed), and placed in the file.

Please use a date stamp (or simply write the date) on all incoming mail that goes into the casefile so that we know when we received important documents. This is particularly helpful for entering or double-checking case notes later.

Picking Up Checks

For as long as our clients are receiving R&P and Matching Grant support, we will issue them checks for cash assistance and bus tickets. If a client comes in to pick up a check, they should meet with their caseworker or the employment specialist. If the caseworker is not in, contact him/her to see if it's ok to give the client the check. If you cannot reach the caseworker, check in with another staff member to see if it's ok to give the client their check. If you are advised to give the client the check, **make sure s/he signs the voucher before handing over the check.** All vouchers must be photo-copied. The signed original voucher will go to Administration and Finance, and the photo-copy will be filed in the case file.

Applying for California ID at the DMV

Once a client has received their Social Security card, they can apply for a CA ID at the DMV. We try to do this for all adults, and we can apply for minors as well. Always make an appointment online in advance. It can be best to make appointments for several clients on the same day, so you can go in a group. **Schedule an appointment here:** <http://www.dmv.ca.gov/foa/welcome.do?localeName=en>.

Documents to bring:

- 🕒 Social Security Card
- 🕒 I-94 with attached photo
- 🕒 ID Card Application
- 🕒 DMV Verification for Reduced Fee Identification (**signed by caseworker**)
- 🕒 \$8.00 for fee
- 🕒 Case face sheet (**if you are filling out the Application at the DMV**)

Before the appointment, fill out the DMV Identification Card application and the DMV Verification for Reduced Fee Identification (located on the shelves next to the water cooler) **and have the caseworker sign the fee waiver** (he or she will be the representative and the client will be the applicant). The ID application form is simple, but you will need to convert the client's measurement from kg to lbs, and cm to feet and inches (you can find this information on the client's entry medical forms in their casefile, or ask the for their weight and height).

Ask the clients to come to the GAA 45 minutes before the appointment so the group can go together by bus. You can take the 1 bus to the DMV (exit at Telegraph and Claremont), which is located at 5300 Claremont Ave, Oakland CA 94618 (between Cavour and Clifton). You can also take the 1R, but exit at 49th and Telegraph, and walk North to Claremont.

When you arrive, get in the Appointments line to get a number for each applicant. Please note that if you are helping several applicants at once, their numbers may be called concurrently, so you may have to bounce around to translate for more than one client at a time as the DMV employees complete their applications and take their fingerprints. If there are extra volunteers available, you want to see if someone is available to help if you are taking a large group.

MOST IMPORTANT - For each applicant, make sure to double-check the spelling of the name and the address on the confirmation printed by the DMV employee – we catch mistakes often. Once the first DMV employee has finished entering the client's information and taken the fingerprint, s/he will direct the client to Window 28 to have their picture taken.

Medical Appointments and Immunizations

Resettlement caseworkers and volunteers (at the request of the caseworker) will contact Refugee Clinic prior to a client's arrival to schedule the initial health screening. Resettlement is responsible for notifying the Health Access Team of each client's appointment information.

Health Access Team volunteers will accompany clients to health appointments unless they don't have anyone available, in which case a resettlement volunteer will step in.

Copy all health correspondence for the casefile and the Health Access Team, giving originals back to the clients for their records, ***except for bills, which should be given directly to Health Access***. For appointment confirmations, the Health Access Team needs to know when clients are supposed to go to Refugee Clinic because they will take those clients. However, if they are unavailable, resettlement volunteers may be asked to assist with taking clients to appointments. All bills, Medi-Cal Choice forms, and health plan correspondence should also go to the Health Access Team.

Please note that **all** child arrivals will need to receive immunizations in the United States to be able to enroll in school. Make sure that the family gets a copy of the immunization records to take for school enrollment.

School Enrollment for K-12

Prior to school enrollment, each child will need to receive immunizations and TB tests in the U.S. at Refugee Clinic – please make sure the Health Access Team knows we will need a copy of their records for school enrollment.

After this is done, the caseworker will make an appointment at the Oakland Unified School District Registration Center at 746 Grand Ave. For school enrollment, you will need to **bring following documents**:

- 🕒 The I-94
- 🕒 Immunization/vaccine/TB test records
- 🕒 3 forms of proof of address, such as: a bank statement or confirmation letter from Wells Fargo; the GAA letter that was sent to Social Services by the caseworker; a letter from Social Services to the client's address; a PG&E or AT&T bill.

They will assign the child to the school closest to his/her house. However, if there are no openings, they will assign him/her to another school and will provide two months worth of AC Transit bus tickets for the child. After the first two months of bus tickets, the family can go back and the OUSD will give them an additional two-months worth of bus tickets (after which they will no longer provide bus tickets).

Once the school assignment is given, you will need to take the child to the school to complete the registration and fill out forms there. Each school has a registration time slot, so check the school's website before you go.

For emergency contacts, list the parents, the US Tie (if there is one), the caseworker's cell phone, and the general GAA number. You will need to bring ID's for the parents and the child (I-94, EAD or CA ID). Once they check all the documents, they will assign the child to a classroom.

Children will be asked to provide dental records, but since our clients generally cannot afford to see a dentist, there is a waiver you can complete to defer the requirement.

Applying for SSI/Disability

Clients who are over 65 or who are disabled are eligible for SSI/Disability. To apply for SSI, you have to schedule an application appointment where a Social Security employee will help the client complete the application. Schedule an appointment by going to the Social Security office (recommended) at 360 22nd Street, 4th Floor, between Franklin and Webster, or you can call [\(866\)964-7420](tel:8669647420) with the client present. The client should have already applied for CalWORKS because it can take several months for SSI to kick in, and up to a month for the application appointment.

Documents and information to bring to the SSI application appointment:

- 🕒 ID. *Bring I-94, Social Security card, and a photo ID (such as EAD card or CA ID).*

- ⌚ Any medical records the client has from Alameda County health clinics. *The worker will have the client complete a Release of Authorization that will give them access to all county medical records. If the client has seen any health or mental health provider outside of the Alameda County system, please bring those records to the appointment.*
- ⌚ Financial records. *Please bring any proof of income, and the previous months bank statement.*
- ⌚ Immigration documents. *Bring I-94, and any other pertinent immigration documentation that indicate when the client came into the country.*
- ⌚ Lease agreement and rent payment information. *In addition to the lease agreement, the worker will need to know who the client lives with, whether friends or family, how much each person pays for rent, and if the client has an dependent or minor children.*

Following submission of the application, the client will receive follow-up instructions in the mail. Once the client begins to receive SSI payments, they should notify their caseworker. Clients are not supposed to receive SSI and RCA/Cash Assistance at the same time, so the caseworker may have to notify the caseworker at Social Services with confirmation of their SSI approval.

Using the Online Database and Entering Case Notes

The Online Database is the platform for updating client information and entering casenotes. For example, when a client moves to a new address, or receives their social security card, we update that personal information in the system, and add a case note to record where they are living or that they have indeed received their social security card.

Please refer to the **Case Note Checklist** to see which case notes are required for each casefile. You should also refer to the **Sample Case Notes**, a comprehensive guide to the text that should be included in the required notes, which are in the back of the **Case Note Checklist** pocket on the wall in the volunteer office.

Updating client information in the Database (such as Social Security number, address and phone number): Go to (**omitted**). Login information and passwords are located on the volunteer whiteboard.

Once you are logged on:

- ⌚ Find the client by doing a search under “View RP Cases”
- ⌚ Choose the “People” tab
- ⌚ Choose edit mode
- ⌚ Double click on the clients name

- ⌚ Edit updated information under “Main” and/or “Address” tabs

Using the Database to enter Case Notes: Go to: (*omitted*). Login information and passwords are located on the volunteer whiteboard.

Once you are logged on:

- ⌚ Find the client by doing a search under “View RP Cases”
- ⌚ Choose the “Case Notes” tab
- ⌚ All case notes should
 - Have a location entered – use N/A if you are unsure (do not use “unknown”)
 - All notes should be entered under a staff name: this will generally be the caseworker, but may be the Site Supervisor, or someone in Employment
 - Indicate who had the client contact. I.e. since the case note is entered in the name of the staff person, indicate, “I (caseworker) provided Travel Loan Counseling...” or “Volunteer accompanied client to Social Services to apply for Food Stamps...”

A case note should be entered to record any significant contact with the clients. For example, each time you accompany a client to an appointment, enter a case note when you return to the office about what you did, with any notes regarding progress and follow-up. Or, if the client has indicated that they plan to move, enter a case note. While the **Case Note Checklist** indicates the minimum required notes, it is likely you will enter additional case notes.

One helpful strategy for tracking notes that have (or have not yet) been entered is to make a copy of the Case Note Checklist for each casefile and cross out each note as it is entered. There are copies of the **Case Notes Checklist** in a pouch on the wall in the Volunteer office.

While it is ideal to enter case notes in real time, this is not always possible, and you may not be qualified to enter all of the notes. There are some case notes that only caseworker will be able to enter (i.e. details about a home visit, or a minor case), so it is important to communicate with the caseworker about what you can and cannot enter for each case. Sometimes we are simply too busy to be able to enter notes each day. What is important is to track the dates of important events so you can go back and enter case notes after the fact

(i.e. make a note on a post-it and place it in the casefile). Often, there are dates on important documents as well, so you may be able to track dates by going through the file, or checking the caseworker's calendar.

Casefile Maintenance

While caseworkers are ultimately responsible for ensuring all casefiles contain the correct documents and case notes, you will be asked to assist in this area and make sure casefiles are as complete as possible before the caseworker reviews them for completion.

Documentation: Following a client's arrival, we will copy, print and track various types of documents that pertain to the case. Please refer to the **Casefile Order** list to see what documents must be included, and in which order they should be placed in the file. Casenotes and other documents, such as the resettlement plan and budget, must be entered in the computer and printed out, then added to the file. Other documents such as correspondence, copies of i.d. cards and confirmations will have to be copied at the time of receipt. There are copies of the **Casefile Order** in a pouch on the wall in the Volunteer office.

Resettlement Plans and Non-Employable Resettlement Plans

As of January 2013, the protocol for creating resettlement/self-sufficiency plans will begin to change. Up until that change is implemented, however, resettlement volunteers may be asked to complete Resettlement and Non-Employable Resettlement plans.

The purpose of these plans is to assess the employability of each client based on their English language fluency, education and work background.

For each client, determine if they are employable or non-employable. According to the GAA Caseworker's Guide, "a non-employable individual is someone that is (a) under age 18 or over 65, (b) someone that has health problems that make him/her unable to work, or (c) someone that is caring for a child under age of one or for a fully dependant person." You can list these individuals on a non-employable resettlement plan for each case. All other individuals are considered employable, and will need a Resettlement Plan.

Most employable adults will be in the Matching Grant program, but some will not depending on eligibility criteria. To complete a Resettlement Plan for an individual on Matching Grant, you can refer to Employment's client files (located in the volunteer office), which contain a Resume and a Resume CV inventory. You will also want to refer to the biodata, which contains educational and work history,

as well as language skills. Since the biodata is sometimes inaccurate, expect the Employment file information to be the most up-to-date. For clients who are not on Matching Grant, the best resource is the client's biodata.

Read the instructions on the Resettlement Plan form in full to figure out how to enter the following information: work history, skills, education, English language ability, other languages, barriers to employment, short term goal, plan of action for short term goal, long term goal, plan of action for long term goal, and budget. Complete what you can based on the information you have, and the caseworker can assist in adding to it, or correcting any information. For clients who do not speak English, and/or have no education or work experience, you can simply explain that their goals are to find a survival job (for example, in a kitchen) for the time being, and that they will be referred to ESL for further training. Other clients may have had careers or intensive training before arrival in the U.S., but need further certification or training here to pursue the same career. In this case, they may pursue a retail or food service survival job in the short term, but have long-term plans to seek education and certification once they have the income to do so.

To complete the forms, logon to Citrix and go to the Online Database:

- ⌚ **(omitted)**
- ⌚ Find the client by doing a search under "View RP Cases"
- ⌚ Choose the "Case Notes" tab
- ⌚ Click on "Print Forms" and select the form:
 - Non-Employable Resettlement Plan
 - Check the non-employable clients
 - Choose preview
 - Complete Reason Exempt and a Plan of Action for each client (i.e. minor will enroll in school, or client will wait until child reaches ages 1 to pursue employment)
 - Print and file for caseworker review
 - Resettlement-Employment Plan (check adults only)
 - Check the employable clients
 - Choose preview and complete form following the instructions on pages 1 and 5. ***Please note that this form cannot be saved, so complete and print. If you close the document you will lose the information you've entered.***
 - Print and file for caseworker review.

Budgets

Each case must also have a budget. Budgets are kept on the Z drive, and your caseworker will ask you if s/he needs assistance with budgets. Upon or in advance of the client/s arrival, we will complete an estimated budget for the first and second month. As a client's income or expenses change (i.e. they find a job, apply for CalWORKS, or move to a cheaper apartment), we will update the budget. By the end of the Resettlement & Placement and Matching Grant periods, we will have a first month budget (includes the R&P payment), second month budget (that will indicate cash assistance through MG or CalWORKS/RCA) and a third budget (that indicates financial security for the client as s/he transitions from GAA assistance).

You should review how to complete a budget with the caseworker, but before you do so, you can also refer to the Required Family Budgets and Timelines in the GAA Caseworker's Guide, as well as the Budget Cheat Sheet (see sample in volunteer office).

Money Sheets and Vouchers

The left side of the casefile is for money sheets and vouchers. These documents are how the staff keeps track of funds and payments. They are saved on the Z drive in each caseworker's file, respectively. For each payment we issue to the client or on behalf of the client (i.e. to pay their landlord or PG&E) there is a voucher that indicates the type of funds. For each client, each payment is tracked on the Money Sheet. So each check issued for a client, there should be a voucher, and the check should be noted on the money sheet, which is simply a list of the vouchers.

When caseworkers request a payment, they complete a voucher and enter the requested payment on the money sheet. Administration and finance will give the caseworker a list of payments, and you may be asked to update the payment date and check numbers on the money sheet, to correspond with the appropriate voucher.

Once vouchers are signed by the caseworker, supervisor and the client, the original signed vouchers should be signed and photo-copied: originals go to Administration and Finance, and copies will be filed in the case file.

WIC – Women, Infants and Children

Pregnant women and families with children age 4 or under are eligible for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) -- a government program that seeks to ensure proper nutrition for low-income mothers and their children. Once enrolled, this assistance is provided in addition to Food Stamps benefits, but families must sign up subsequently, and go through a series of trainings for how to use WIC vouchers. The

Health Access Team provides support in this area. Please check in with your caseworker regarding mothers, and families with young children, to see if they should be referred to the Health Access Team for assistance enrolling in WIC.

Other important information:

- 🕒 Case files are confidential and should not leave the office.
- 🕒 Shred all documents with client info that do not need to be saved.
- 🕒 There are important confidentiality laws pertaining to mental health and health information. If you have sensitive health documents, check with the Health Access Team or Mental Health to see how those documents should be filed.

Glossary and Acronyms:

Alien Number: The number on the 1-94 that verifies our client's date of entry.

Anchor / U.S. Tie: A client's relative or friend who agree to help new arrival in some capacity with resettlement.

AOR: Affidavit of relationship. The family reunification form.

BIC: Benefits Identification Card. The BIC card is the Medi-Cal card.

Case name: Name of P.A.

Case number: Each case is assigned a number that is searchable in the Online Database: two letter, six number code (i.e. JF-123456).

Case size: number of people on the case.

Case type: "Geo" indicates that the client has a U.S. Tie or Anchor, while "Free" indicates that the client has no U.S. Tie or Anchor.

Country of Origin: Where a refugee is originally from.

Country of Asylum: Where a refugee was before they arrived in the U.S.

DHS: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

DOE: Date of Entry (to the U.S.).

DOS: U.S. Department of State.

EAD: Employment authorization document. Our clients receive an EAD card that serves as a form of identification and signifies that our clients have the legal right to work in the U.S. The card is issued by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

EBT: Electronic Benefit Transfer. The EBT card is the card that holds funds that are issued to our clients for Food Stamps and Refugee Cash Assistance.

Exit Country: refers to the country the client came to the U.S. from, and is generally the site of resettlement outside of their country of origin, where they waited for 3rd country resettlement.

Family Size: Number of people in the family, including the P.A.

Free Case: The client/s is arriving on his/her (or their) own and does not have a relative or friend in the area to help assist with resettlement.

Grove Foundation: The Grove Foundation offers career-based scholarships to qualifying refugees and asylees. Applicants must be currently employed.

I-94: The most important form of identification our clients have when they arrive in the U.S. The card includes an identification number, which can be used on applications until our clients receive their Social Security card. The I-94 verifies our client's date of entry and is issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

INS Status: indicates the status of the client. I.e. they may be a refugee, asylee, or have a Special Immigration Visa (SIV).

IOM: International Office of Migration. The IOM oversees the travel of refugees to the United States and provides them with a loan to pay for their airfare. Our clients are issued a Promissory Note from IOM upon entry into the country outlining the amount of the loan that our clients will have to repay.

LPR: Legal Permanent Resident (Green Card holder).

MG / Matching Grant: An employment training program that provides cash assistance to our clients. Each client's caseworker will decide if s/he is eligible for the program.

P.A.: For each case there is a Principal Applicant, referred to often as the PA. Their name is the name that the casefile and case number will correspond to. The PA's family members will often be included in the case.

POB: Place of birth.

Port of Entry: refers to the airport the client arrived at in the United States.

PRM: Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (of the U.S. Department of State).

OPE: Overseas processing entity.

RAD: Refugee Affairs Division (of USCIS).

R&P: Reception and Placement program. The U.S. Refugee Admissions R&P program is the 90 day program that we provide for recently resettled refugees, which entails the bulk of resettlement support that we offer.

RCA: Refugee Cash Assistance. Clients who apply for CalWORKS receive RCA.

RFE: Request for Evidence.

RPC: Refugee processing Center.

RSC: Refugee Support Center.

SIV: Special Immigrant Visa. These are currently offered to Iraqis and Afghans who worked for the U.S. Government in some capacity, often as an interpreter. Clients with SIV's receive green cards upon entry and go through the Reception and Placement program.

SSN: Social security number.

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

USC: United States Citizen.

USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

USRAP: U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Volag: voluntary resettlement agency (such as the GAA or Catholic Charities).

VOP: Verification of Placement. This document is granted to clients who have a US Tie/Anchor.

Important Phone Numbers:

OMITTED