

- Theresa McLeod will talk about “Engaging Community Leaders.” Theresa has been Assistant to Mayor Dave Bieter, serving as a community liaison, since 2004. She is a native of Boise, but has also lived and worked in Washington DC as a staffer for former Idaho Sen. Jim McClure. Theresa has a passion for community service and has been a terrific partner in refugee resettlement for the last five years.
- Kituta Asimba is a Health Educator and Refugee Liaison with El Ada Community Action Partnership and is currently working on a Master’s degree in Bilingual Education at Boise State University. Asimba is a native of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and has lived in Boise for almost 5 years. He was involved in the original needs assessment and planning process that we’ll be talking about today and is very active in community refugee issues. Asimba’s role today will be to talk about engaging refugees in partnership development.
- Sherry Dyer will be our final presenter and will share her perspective on “Initiating and Sustaining the Effort.” Sherry’s expertise lies in mediation, facilitation and group process. She is recently retired from her position as Vice President for Human Resources and Organizational Development at Oppenheimer Companies in Boise, but continues to work as a consultant for strategic planning, management development and process improvement. Sherry has been indispensable in moving our planning process forward.

[SLIDE #4: Why We’re having this Discussion]

- Each of us on the webinar may have special reasons for deciding to be a part of this discussion, but it seems pretty clear to me that the forces driving the conversation boil down to these three: “Capacity,” “The Need for Information,” and the idea that we human beings are not instinctively “inclusive.”
- Each of these forces has been apparent in the Boise strategic planning process, but it’s important to note that they are not forces in isolation; they are all quite clearly interrelated.

[SLIDE #5: The Question of Capacity]

- Talking about the “Question of Capacity” is really asking more bluntly, “Just how many refugees can this place handle?” It is and has been a hot topic among refugee resettlement professionals—from PRM and ORR all the way down to local service providers—but it’s also a very vocal concern of certain elected officials, policy makers and local mainstream organizations whose work is directly affected by refugees arriving in a community. Concerns over “Capacity” have everything to do with the perception that “we can’t even take care of our own; how can we accommodate more people coming from outside?”
 - I don’t mean to pick on anyone in particular, but you’ve probably heard about the Tennessee “Refugee Absorptive Capacity Act” passed in 2011, which provides a mechanism for city governments to request a moratorium on arrivals if some unstated capacity threshold has been crossed . . .
 - And this state law doesn’t exist in isolation. There are other widely known examples of efforts to restrict resettlement at both the state and local levels.
 - And, you’re probably familiar with the GAO report on Refugee Resettlement published last year regarding a study of the “effects refugees have on their communities and refugees’ integration into U.S. society.”

- The Question seems to assume that there is a finite capacity in each receiving community to absorb newly arriving refugees . . . but what is that capacity it and how do you measure it?
- At the same time we're engaged in this discussion of "Capacity," we know that refugees in dire situations overseas are dying every day, that protection through resettlement must remain a viable option for tens of thousands of vulnerable people. The advocacy effort to keep admissions levels up is very strong.
- So what can we do? There are a couple of points I'd like to offer for consideration:
 - One, the capacity for effective resettlement is dynamic. It may actually be a futile exercise to try to define capacity in terms of a limiting number because that capacity will continue to change.
 - Second, capacity is really about the quality of the resettlement experience. Where a community can demonstrate successful outcomes, capacity becomes a non-issue.
- In Boise, we have taken an approach in addressing the "capacity question." We have resisted the impulse to come up with a number (for example, "we have the absorptive capacity to resettle 200 or 300 or 1,000 refugees in the course of any year") and instead focused on identifying and coordinating resources to increase capacity. In the next 40 minutes or so, we plan to share the model of resource planning and partnership development used in Boise to address the capacity question.

[SLIDE #6: The Need To Know]

The "Need to Know" relates quite directly to feelings of uncertainty about refugees. Here are some typical expressions:

- "I see people at the bus stop, at the grocery outlet, in our children's classrooms, but I don't know who they are or how they got here."
- "I read about refugees coming to live in my community and I see stories on television, but I don't understand the whole thing."
- "Why do we need more refugees here?"
- "We're seeing more and more refugees seeking help from my agency, my church, my synagogue, the Food Bank where I volunteer. I'm not sure how best to help them"
- These statements are not unique to any community, nor are they especially threatening, although they may seem so at first blush. They're really cries for more information.

[SLIDE #7: Inclusiveness is a Learned Behavior]

- Inclusiveness is a learned behavior . . . but, I would add, so is the opposite of inclusiveness.
- And while "equality for all" may be the quintessential American value, I don't think inclusiveness has made it to that level quite yet. Humans have a long and unhappy history of dehumanizing and demonizing each other.
- What our identity instincts tell us more often is to be wary of the "other." Too much trust of those outside the tribe or clan can get you into big trouble.

- If Inclusiveness is a learned behavior, then, how do we learn it?
- Some of us may have learned through our upbringing. Others through a faith system. Still others have simply experienced some kind of epiphany.
- The trouble, of course, with inclusiveness being a learned behavior is that a lot of people—probably most people—just haven’t learned it yet. Not everyone is going to embrace a “global world view.”
- Welcoming America has talked frequently about the fertile ground of the “Undecided” and the “Untapped.” These are certainly the folks we want to try to reach, but I would suggest that we don’t completely ignore the “Opposed” and the “Adamantly Opposed.” These folks may never become allies, but their impact may be neutralized or moderated.
- Simply put, we wouldn’t even be having the “Capacity” discussion if we didn’t have this propensity to compartmentalize people into “We” and “They.” As soon as the “They” become seen as the “We,” we find ways to move over and make room.
- If you agree with this concept of inclusiveness, then it’s clearly the challenge to teach it and find like-minded folks to help you. There’s no better place to start than with young people.

[SLIDE #8: Part I: Introduction to the “Boise Model”]

- “The Perfect Storm,” ever since the book and movie of the same name, has come to mean the confluence of multiple forces that combine with devastating consequences. I’ll talk more about how these multiple forces are relevant to the “Boise Model” when we get the next slide.
- I quote Rahm Immanuel here: “Never let a serious crisis go to waste,” because even though we didn’t embrace his exact phrase at the time, we did approach the problem of our own “perfect storm” with the attitude that something had to be done and that the situation offered an opportunity for collaboration and joint problem solving. In retrospect, the crisis convened people who may never have otherwise come together in the same way.
- The “Approach” we took is about how the Boise Model came to exist. We were lucky to have a natural convener—the Mayor—who was looking for solutions to the concerns he was hearing about. Our process, like many similar planning efforts, was about brainstorming, listening, prioritizing and—as we found out—the need for serious and ongoing education about refugees and the resettlement process.
- As the series of meetings and discussions took their natural course, we found relatively easy agreement in working toward a needs assessment process and development of a strategic plan.
- So, now, the Challenge ahead is to do everything we can to keep it going.

[SLIDE #9: Capacity Crisis of 2008 (Boise)]

- In our case, the Capacity Crisis—or “Perfect Storm”—that struck full force at the end of 2008 was the result of the convergence of
 1. Record high refugee arrivals (with nearly 60% of our annual arrivals coming in July, August and September);
 2. A plummeting job market;

3. A suddenly inadequate safety net for recently arrived refugees, and limited capacity within mainstream institutions to provide the level of support demanded by the new economic reality;
 4. ORR funding was also lagging behind demand for services for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the rapid growth of the arrival caseload; and
 5. To top it all off, there was mounting anxiety in the community at-large about the continued viability of receiving new refugees. Many responsible and otherwise supportive community members started to ask how they were supposed to deal with the multiple needs of so many families.
- I'm sure many of you will remember and relate to this scenario.

[SLIDE #10: Response to Capacity Crisis]

Theresa is going to talk about the role of City government in responding to the crisis, but I'd like to mention just a couple of points:

- Early on, even before the recession took hold, we'd identified the need to expand community partnerships and to become a more effective resource to the multitude of organizations that touched refugees in so many ways.
- So, in recognition of this need, the IOR established a quarterly "community-wide" forum for all comers who were interested in working more effectively or more collaboratively on refugee issues; or simply were looking for help improving their ability to work effectively with refugees.
- About a year later, we were hit from all sides by the "Storm," Mayor Dave Bieter was hearing from the schools, the police department, and community members-at-large about the impact they were feeling. The mayor decided to take the lead in seeking solutions.
- I'd like to also point out that the "Multiple Stakeholders" that were convened were more than just the usual suspects—the Mayor has the ability to call a meeting and people will come.
- And this, then, was the beginning of the work that became a community-owned strategic plan to try to make an impact on the resources available for successful refugee resettlement in our city.
- One key agreement made early in the process was that the effort should focus on growing resources (hence capacity) rather than trying to put a cap on resettlement—if we could garner resources—coordinate, consolidate, expand where possible, and make more accessible—then it might be possible to bring community capacity up to meet the resource need. This is what I like to refer to as "Reframing the Dialogue."
- One last point here: Even though we chose not to focus on limiting the number of refugee arrivals, the two largest resettlement agencies in Boise did voluntarily request a temporary reduction for one year—as the right thing to do for refugees and for a struggling community. This action went a long way toward building good will.

[SLIDE #11: The Plan Itself]

I want to emphasize that the "Plan" is not the same as the "Effort" or the "Change." The Plan is only the blueprint for community action. Community action promoting positive change is the purpose of the Plan.

- I've included this slide to give you a sense of what is included in the Plan itself. There is link to the entire Plan and accompanying documents on the IOR website, which you'll see at the end of the presentation.
- In a nutshell, the purpose of the Plan is to strengthen the supports for successful refugee resettlement in the greater Boise area.
- The Plan has six sections addressing Education, Employment, Health Care, Housing, Transportation and Social Integration.
- Each section has an overarching goal, specific objectives, and action steps to achieve those objectives.
- Responsible parties are identified, as are potential or actual partners that should be involved in accomplishing the objective.
- Quarterly progress reporting keeps everyone, including the community-at-large, informed about accomplishments and achievements related to the Plan and to the expansion of resources within the community.

[SLIDE #12: Fundamental Principles]

We've given a lot of thought to the idea of replicability of the process we've developed in Boise and here are some thoughts in the form of "Fundamental Principles," fundamental in the sense that they should apply anywhere and travel well from place to place.

- Practitioners of all stripes, community volunteers, educators and certainly refugees themselves all want to succeed in their endeavors. This is an attribute that's in your favor. If you can provide some effective tools for working with refugees, organizations and individuals are very likely to come on board. It's when they're frustrated, when the standard tools don't work with refugees, when there are seemingly insurmountable language, cultural and educational barriers blocking the way . . . this is when you start to see support for refugee resettlement fade away. As a corollary to this principle, when people—whoever they are—feel valued, appreciated and well served, they are much more likely to feel that they belong to a community.
- Information is crucial. We have found a thirst for a better understanding of refugees and refugee resettlement that seems nearly endless. There are also many misperceptions that can only be corrected with a continuous flow of information. Believe in the value of transparency. Consider it your job to be sure that everyone in the community has all the information needed to be an effective partner. Tempting as it is sometimes, I would caution against the impulse to fly below the radar.
- Remember when your mother told you, "To have a friend, you have to be a friend?" Well, the same rule applies to having partners. If you're willing to serve on boards, get involved in community planning efforts and find other ways to support community initiatives, you're likely to experience a high degree of reciprocity. This principle is not unrelated to the principle of helping others succeed by providing the tools they need.
- As Susan said in her introduction, every community is unique, so cloning or transplanting a process in its entirety from one place to another isn't likely to be a recipe for success.
 - It's crucial to assess the community climate, map resources, build your own particular partnerships and tailor your approach to fit your unique circumstances.

[Slide #17: City Government Priorities]

Goals of the city's strategic plan were formulated by citizen surveys, focus groups, employee and elected input. Any effort or initiative we direct based on these goals (ensure, promote, foster) has natural buy-in. Evaluation of how we are achieving these goals through internal partners as well as external partners. Basic requirement of city to deliver services to all its residents provides the platform for evaluation.

[Slide #18: Involvement of City Partners]

- The cultivation of the use of Mayor's leadership began with (a) IOR engaging our office through its CC meetings and annual conferences. Jan contacted our office anytime officials came to Boise. And (b) resettlement agencies reaching introducing themselves to our office through invitations to community events and meetings with national representatives.
- These conversations allowed the City to begin its evaluation of service delivery to its newest residents. Several city departments provide the natural bridge connecting immigrants and refugees based on the services provided e.g. language resources and classes at the library; youth programs thru Parks and Rec; celebration of diversity and culture through Arts and History; affordable housing programs and public safety.
- As community partners expressed concern about not knowing the resettlement's process in order to accommodate services needed, the recession was limiting resources even more.

[Slide 19: Community Partners]

- The Mayor appreciated the concerns being expressed and knew more information was needed in order to not jeopardize resettlement efforts while respecting the limited resources community organizations had to respond to growing needs.
- The Mayor convened a roundtable of community partners, resettlement agencies and IOR. Clear, accurate information was provided by IOR. Partners appreciated learning about the fundamentals of refugee resettlement globally, nationally and locally. The Mayor committed city staff and asked IOR to join in leading a process that would create a plan that identifies key components critical for getting through the recession (short term) and provide successful resettlement (long term).
- As the components were identified, it became clear to the Mayor and his city team that other segments of our community would benefit from improving, expanding resources – which is important given our responsibility to all residents : Students of all ages would benefit from improvements to education; residents relying on public transportation would benefit from expanding services or innovative van sharing opportunities; access to health care for limited English speakers or others with language/access barriers; increasing opportunities for job training...

[Slide 20: Leadership]

- The Mayor's public presence and community respect generate an environment of willing partnership (coming to the table) as well as a bully pulpit to raise awareness of refugee resettlement and the entrepreneurial spirit so many of our refugees bring to the community. A key component that lends to the success of the process is professional facilitation – everyone has many other responsibilities to tend to so someone else guiding the process is important.
- City department improvements associated with the RRSCP include the Mobile Recreation Van; increased English Language resources at all libraries; increased programming affiliated with school based community centers; trainings offered for landlords; BPD Refugee Liaison.

glimpse of hope to be part of solution to their issues, then how can they expect to improve their life to any host community! Therefore, I feel that my involvement could be part of the solution.

[SLIDE #26: Benefits to Refugees and Community]

- As far as mentioning the success of this plan, this plan outlined a vision for Idaho to follow. It has some set objectives to be accomplished in different areas. This plan touches the most important issues affecting refugees in our community. To me, the biggest challenge was to have a plan in place since that took a lot courage and determination among all collaborative members. Now the community has a compass to follow. Of course this plan was centered on refugees, as they are the primary beneficiary to this plan. Once the plan is set into action, some of the refugee's issues will lessen. I am confident that since Idaho has put this plan in place, it will be only a matter of mobilizing those who were not aware or involved about it to implement the recommendations proposed so that it can bear some fruits. The community will benefit tremendously from this strategic plan and since refugees have become part of our community, we need to include them in our strategic planning and budgetary concerns. The more successfully we integrate refugees in our community, the better and healthier our community becomes.
- I would urge other communities that do not have a strategic plan in place start having a conversation as to why they don't and how their community may benefit from one. A country or a community without a vision could very easily become disorganized and lose connection with their refugee population. Collaboration and networking are important roles for the success of integration for refugees. The communities and refugees themselves should be more conscious about what is going on in their community. The plan should highlight the strengths and weaknesses about what is working and not working in the community. The plan should help guide all the stakeholders to be more successful and considering of refugees. This plan should be mirrored from both perspectives: refugees and the community at large.

[SLIDE #27: How to Get Refugees Involved]

- There are a lot of efforts that need to take place before dreaming of any strategic planning. A need of community mobilization and identifying refugee's ethnic based community or some refugee leaders in the community. Ask refugees about their major challenges and successes. See what organizations work most closely with refugees and include them to be part of the conversation. Empower refugees to have a voice and how that voice could be heard. Motivate and raise the level of consciousness of the refugee's ethnic based organization so they feel they are valued and recognized in the community they live in. When refugee organizations come to the table, create an encouraging cultural environment so they can feel free to share their experiences and feel as if they are part of the plan and overall vision of the community. In the due process, ensure and assure the refugee's ethnic based organization that the plan is serious and it will not be put under the table or on the web page for show; rather it will be reviewed

and successes. We have quarterly written progress reports. This is really working because people are really committed.

[Slide #33: Expanding the Circle]

A critical part of the effort is ensuring that more and more people get engaged. The idea is to release the reins to let other people guide the work. We continually respond to community priorities, and we always celebrate success.

[Slide #34: Process to Outcome]

We believe that what gets planned gets done. When we know our purpose, processes, and have engaged people, the results are outstanding.

[Slide #35: For More Information]

Thank you so much, Sherry and Asimba. We're going to take a moment for questions again.

1. Let's start by talking about engaging refugees. What are some suggestions for refugee groups that feel that city and mainstream stakeholders may not want to listen to them? How can we make refugees feel more welcome? How can they be advocates for themselves in these situations?
 - a. Asimba – The plan has to come from somewhere. All of the people who are involved need to establish good background and rapport with those communities. Here is a pragmatic example. Jan Reeves would come on the ground and talk to people to find out their concerns before they even officially came into the process. Another thing is to build a culture of trust where refugees can come and speak about their opinions and ideas. Most refugees don't trust the promises because there have been so many false promises. Make sure that you can measure that this plan is going to work. It is important for refugees to trust that this plan is going to be effective and benefit them.
2. Can you talk a little bit about the role of local refugee resettlement agencies and how they work together on this process?
 - a. Jan Reeves – Sherry has been involved in the work of each of the subcommittees. Refugee resettlement agencies have all been a part of the process. At every stage, they have been involved in planning. They are key parts of implementation plan.
 - b. Sherry Dyer – I think you've said it. The great thing is that these leaders are chairing some of the work committees. They are great resources for everyone involved. They are at the table all the time. They chair committees and participate in all of the committees.
 - c. Theresa McLeod – In order for the mayor to be invested in this process, it was critical to have resettlement agencies to be involved.
3. Can you talk about any outcomes you've seen so far?
 - a. Jan Reeves – One of the things we have been successful in doing is recording outcomes. The progress reports are directly related to the goals of the plan.
 - b. Theresa McLeod – From the city's perspective, some of the successful outcomes have been housing and community development hosting landlord trainings so that landlords would be more willing to open opportunities for refugee residents. We have more programming through parks and recreation. We have increased tutoring and support for families. Success can also be measured in what new partners have come to the table. For example, a children's hospital has come to the table to discuss the health of refugee children.

