



Voices from the Field: Connecting with Virginia's Refugee Resettlement Agencies

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Host: Welcome to the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center's podcast series *Voices from the Field*. This podcast series highlights the stories of adult education educators and learners around the state of Virginia. I'm Elizabeth, the Literacy Specialist at the Resource Center.

Host: And I am Hali, the ESOL Specialist at the Resource Center. Today, our episode is going to highlight some of the refugee resettlement agencies across the state of Virginia. During our discussion, we will hear more about the services each agency provides to their refugee clients and how our adult education programs can build partnerships with the agencies to further serve refugees and our programs. And before we get started if our guest speakers can go ahead and introduce themselves.

Laurel: My name is Laurel Collins and I'm Associate Director for Self Sufficiency with Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) in the Diocese of Arlington and Northern Virginia.

Kristen: Hi, everyone, my name is Kristen Larger I'm the Director of Operations for Commonwealth Catholic Charities, Refugee and Immigration Services. Our office is located in Hampton Roads and we serve refugees and immigrants throughout the Hampton Roads area.

Thierry: Hi, everyone, my name is Thierry Barihinyuza from CWS (Church World Services) Harrisonburg, and I'm in charge of health career pathways.

Host: Great, thank you all for joining us today. We want to start off our conversation by hearing from each of you all about the range of services provided by your organizations for your clients. So the first question we have to start off this discussion is what individuals do you serve? And how do they connect with your organization?

Kristen: So a refugee resettlement office serves what we call Office of Refugee Resettlement eligible populations we call ORR, Office of Refugee Resettlement. That includes not just refugees, but also asylees, special immigrant visa holders who are usually from Afghanistan or Iraq, international victims of trafficking, also Cuban Haitian entrance,

Amerasians, and most recently, the Afghan and Ukrainian parolees that are that we've been seeing in the past two years.

The way that we're connected to those populations is varied. The probably, the most common way that we're connected to refugees is through the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). So all of our offices are affiliates. We're affiliates of this kind of larger network that's made up of nine, what's called refugee, well, they're called volunteer agency. So there's nine volunteer agencies, on our on our podcast right now we have two represented, which is the Conference of Catholic Bishops. That's USCCB. And then we also have Church World Services, CWS. But there are others too. And in Virginia, there's four others, I think. So those those volunteer agencies work directly with the State Department and with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, to vet and bring refugees into the country via that USRAP, United States refugee admissions program. So all the vetting, all the security checks, that's all done prior, and then and then refugees flying to the country. And then our affiliates meet them at the airport and start services with them. So that's the primary way that we're connected to refugees. There's a lot of other various channels asylees receive their status, not through the USRP. But once they come into the country, and once they receive asylum status there, hopefully, hopefully, it's not always the case, they're supposed to be given information from whatever entity has helped them obtain their asylum to connect with a resettlement agency because they are eligible for services just like a refugee would be.

And then, for example, for international trafficking victims, our site is a registered T-vic provider, which is Trafficking Victims Assistance Program. That's through another vol-og (volunteer organization). So that vol-og, USCRI, which is the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. They're the ones who refer international trafficking victims to us. Um, parolees receive their status at the border as well, usually through CBP, and then they're given information to connect with their local resettlement agency. So they kind of just walk in and they just call us or they show up and then and then we're able to start services with them. We have another category of immigrants called Second Migrants. Maybe they, for example, maybe they initially resettled in you know, Pennsylvania, but they decide to, have a cousin in Virginia, and so they come into Virginia. And they're still eligible for services for up to five years from arrival. So um, so there are various pathways to getting connected to to these or populations.

Thierry: I think Kristen have said all all about refugee immigration resettlement agency, basically, we do the services as she said, we serve refugees, we serve special visa holders, we've served with humanitarian parolees. That means Afghan and Ukrainian right now. And special visa holder, that's mean some people from Iraq and Syria, and we say serve asylum seekers. But we recently have new programs in our office in Harrisonburg. That's immigrant in general, regardless of their immigration status as long as they living in here as legal immigrants. And the way we get connected, is, as she said, so we receive mainly refugees at the port of entry. And our job is to make sure that the transition from there for the time that they arrive in the US and they get settled down and start a new life in the US. And that's how we get connected to refugees. And same for people who hold special visas and humanitarian parolees, and asylum seekers, people who need asylum, reach out to our offices, and we help them apply for the

asylum and giving them legal counseling, then there are the special programs that help immigrants just for any immigrant who lives in the area. Basically, that's what we do. And that's how we connect to our clients.

Host: Well, thank you for describing the various ways that immigrants and refugees and asylees can connect with your programs and describing the vast range of people that you are able to serve and the ways that you're able to serve them. So we want to kind of shift the focus of the conversation to what services you all provide to those individuals that you do serve. So first, can you tell us more about some of the non-educational services that you provide?

Kristen: So, okay, this is Kristen in Newport News with CCC. It's really hard actually to talk about non-educational services, because so much of resettlement is based in education. I mean, that's like the crux is we believe that with education and knowing your community and knowing resources, that's how you become more autonomous and self-sufficient, and that leads to long term immigration. So some of these things, I say, like might kind of blend with education, but we do provide very hands-on services as well. Within the first 90 days, our staff have to provide all the basic material needs for refugees. So the food, the clothing, the shelter, connection to public benefits. So it's a very hands on assistance that all resettlement agencies are required to do within 90 days of of one's arrival. And then there's, you know, the continued services. So we have staff that help with the health needs, connecting them to their primary care doctor, to a specialty doctor. They need pregnancy help, a lot of kids need, you know, eyeglasses for school. And so our staff help help them with that.

We'll talk more about employment, but a huge program of ours, the employment program. You know, literally just sitting down and just doing job applications with them sometimes is part of that. Big educational components of that too, but I think we'll talk about that next. We also focus a lot on social activities. For example, anything that can build the social bridges and bonds. We do a lot with the kids, making sure they get connected to clubs, memberships, volunteer opportunities, we've hosted cultural events like the Persian New Year, which is called Nowruz. Um, we provide one on one mentorships for young adults if they, if they need it. And we try to connect them with the, with their faith groups, if they are a faith, a lot of refugees are Muslim. So we do try to get them connected to a mosque if they want. So a lot of the services we're doing is just again, to build the social bonds and bridges. At CCC, we also offer interpreter services. So for anytime you need to sit down and you have a meeting and you, I imagine none of us speak Dari, you know, you have to have that interpreter there. So we we have an internal program for, that, where we can hire interpreters; many of our interpreters were past refugees, which is great. And then we also have an in-house immigration legal clinic. So for example, refugees after one year, they have to adjust their status so they can get their green card. All of these Afghan parolees who have come in have to apply for asylum. So we're able to do that in-house. So those are just some examples of the non-educational services in Newport News.

Laurel: So this is Laurel, Catholic Charities Migration Refugee Services in Northern Virginia. As Kristen mentioned, you know, there's a really wide range of of services, to help newly arrived refugees to settle and to become integrated and self-sufficient as quickly as possible. So this

usually begins with pre arrival planning, coordinating with their local ties if they have family members or friends here, identifying housing. And then on arrival day, this really starts the reception and placement core services, which would be pick-up from the airport, you know, securing housing, providing safety and cultural orientation. And then basic needs support, providing basic household items and furniture, and then connecting the family with the local health department to assess their health needs, assisting them with getting social security cards, accessing public benefits, and making sure the program that the family is eligible to receive, you know, and connecting them to any benefits they're eligible to, for. We help them with school registration, orientation to the US public school system. And really, we want to help the family to achieve the earliest possible self-sufficiency. We connect them to ESL classes, that is a requirement within 10 days, 10 working days of their arrival and employment services. So the overall goal of the US refugee resettlement program is earliest possible self-sufficiency through employment and integration to their local community. So a lot of the things that Kristen mentioned are ways in which we do help them to become to become self-sufficient to be able to navigate their new community and to just become a part of the community and of course, self-sufficient.

Thierry: Oh, this is Thierry from CWS. Harrisonburg, as Kristen and Laurel said, I think, basically all the resettlement agencies in in the US or in Virginia, do mostly the same thing regarding to refugees. The only thing that we may differ may be some other program that we do internally and locally. But basically, we do the same thing for refugees. We do the pre preparation for the new arrivals, pre arrivals, then after arrivals, like before 90 days, before 30 days, we have to make sure that they have housing, they have Medicaid, they have social services, they have food stamps, and they can be self-sufficient by themselves. And we have to make sure after the 90 days that they have jobs, so we help them with job, we help them with job orientation. We help them with, kind of, it's not education, but kind of giving them and showing them the opportunity that are in the area. So and we help them with connecting connecting them the local DSS, helping them opening bank account, making sure that they received TANF, and then finding them a housing and then rolling them in school. Making sure that they have a PCP their PCP screening, making sure that they have their primary physician or these are the things that are kind of non-educational, but at the same time a kind of education because we have to do some cultural orientation for them to know all this stuff. And for the people who are not refugees, like immigrant who have been living in here for a long time or refugee who have been living here for a long time. So we have other programs, like the preferred community, where we have the vulnerable people, we have this program for that we call DV, domestic violence, where we help people who are facing domestic violence risk. Recently, we have a new program in our office called home study personal lives, and where we help children who don't have. who have been, who came in the US and who don't have parents like, and the Federal (government) wanting to put them in their community. So we have someone working on this kind of service, that kind of non-education, but at the same time related to education. Thank you.

Host: Thank you all for talking about the unique aspects of each of your programs. But then also, the similarities across the comprehensive and holistic services that you provide to help immigrants and refugees and asylees really become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. And I

really liked the emphasis on that. And so yes, providing, you know, the basic living needs and housing and health connection to health care, and, and all those things that are going to be very important for their immediate arrival, but also as they continue on living in the US. So now that we've heard about some of these non-academic services, could you all talk a little bit about some of the more academic services that you provide through your organizations.

Laurel: This is Laurel. As I mentioned previously, we do have to refer our clients to ESL classes within 10 working days of their arrival. We also require that all our clients participate in ongoing cultural orientation workshops and training. We also provide a job readiness workshop for clients in multiple languages. And then once we identify what types of trainings will help the clients become more employable, and to better fit into the labor market, we do, we are able to help them connect to trainings, and some of those common trainings might be in the health care field, Personal Care Aide, Certified Nurse Aide training, medical assistant training, phlebotomy EMT training. We also have helped clients with earning industry recognized credentials in childcare and in IT. At Catholic Charities we offer the Comp TIA IT fundamentals and Comp TIA plus. We also have a basic computer class for clients who don't have, who have limited digital literacy. So our goal is really to partner with local area training providers and to help them to increase their employability, you know, through through trainings. But the first initial days really, it's it's focused, our focus is on helping to orient them to life in the US, you know, safety, their local community, also culture, and you know, World of Work orientation. So that's like the primary focus for the first 90 days.

Thierry: This is Thierry from Church World Services, Harrisonburg. So as Laura say, we have 10 days to help all refugees to enroll in English classes in the in the area. So we have 10 days to make sure that all adults in, in the refugee that will receive are enrolled in English classes. Also, besides that, we have different programs that help refugees, immigrant and even asylum seekers who want to continue their education to find the right pathway for their education. So besides that, for refugees, we help them with driving classes. For those who want to go back to school, we help them to find the right pathway for their education. We have different pathways, we have skill trades, career pathways, we have healthcare career pathways for both immigrant and for both refugees.

Kristen: This is Kristen, I'm in Newport News. I think the educational component of resettlement is one of the most interesting because, it's not as structured as that 90-day. like, material needs provision. And, and so you can see across the state of Virginia, like how different and unique the services are, and how flexible, like we have so much flexibility when providing educational services, which I think is a real strength of actually the whole USRAP is, you know, some populations like Ukrainians are going to need different sorts of educational services, then maybe those from the Congo, for example.

So just, yeah, I mean, in addition to, you know, what Thierry and Laurel said, like ESL, I mean is, is, of course, like one of the most important educational offerings that we have, we, we try to do. For our ESL program, we've really aligned ourselves with local adult education in Newport News. Our teachers are trained to give that CASAS testing, we use the same books and

curriculum as local adult ed. So it's kind of, they do that intro course with us. And they're supposed to smoothly transition into more classes through adult ed. And then we've really just been able to, by adding, because we've added staff specifically for refugee education, that that definitely tackled some of those cultural orientation topics that that they mentioned. Plus training was a huge one, we've really had to educate folks on how to take the bus, we put volunteers on the bus with them, and they ride their routes together, which can be really funny to hear the story afterwards, there's always an issue, there's always a stop missed or something took too long or whatever. But, they're really just trying to educate them on you know, like, like what Laurel said, them just being more self-sufficient. Like, you'd have to be able to get to places on your own and not not rely on other people all the time. So bus training has been a recent very big educational effort on our front, we can also do a lot with financial literacy. It really, I mean, just the difference between like a checking and a savings account, how do you check your online pay stubs, because everything's online. Now, can they even get into their online account with their employer?

We've recently started working with a local, actually, and they were on the previous podcast, Literacy for Life. So we're working with them to bring more digital literacy lessons, which is so important. I mean, you definitely get folks who come, who've never, you know, unfortunately, never had the opportunity to even hold a cell phone before. So we're starting that up soon. And then one of Virginia's like, biggest efforts recently is more education on mental health and mental health, just in general services, not necessarily clinical services offered through resettlement, but educational, what is mental health? What does, what is trauma, what does it look like? Why are individuals feeling a certain way? We even do the vocabulary, like what is fatigue, you know, like teaching these words, so that they can go to their doctors or their counselors and talk you know, more, more intelligently about it. So, in culture shock, we do talk about culture shock and, and culture adaptation.

Thierry: This is Thierry again, we have some other program that, kind of, we refer our clients to the local education institutions. So like recently we had ESL CDL (Commercial Driver's License) Class that was in parallel with the Blue Ridge Community College, the ESL ESL supported CDL so we had this big population of immigrants who don't speak good English and who don't understand their CDL manual. So in partnership with the Blue Ridge Community College, so we were able to, to start a class with this immigrant and 90% of them passed their Learner's Permit of the CDL because of that ESL supported class. Also, we we have other beside well, beside of this, cultural orientation classes. We have something that we do for elder people on that we call Tai Chi, so it's a kind of place for old people like 60, 65, 70, people to meet and to share ideas and to do some kind of yoga, but at same time learning something new.

Laurel: This is Laurel again, I'm just going to add a couple more points. One of the ways in which Catholic Charities has been able to offer trainings to our clients and education opportunities, has been through adapting some certifications and industry recognized credentials for English language learners. So one of the areas that we've, that this program has been successful is with helping clients who are interested in working in childcare and daycare to earn on this new industry recognized credentials. But to get the extra support that they need to

be able to understand and learn the vocabulary and get through the trainings. And, similarly, we've done the same with our basic computer classes, and also customer service training as well. So for many of our clients who might not have might have limited English proficiency, that's a huge help. Otherwise, if we have clients who are, you know, have an interest in commercial truck driving, this is very popular among our clients, as was just mentioned, they really need to focus on English first, before being able to enroll. But if there's ways in which the trainings can be adapted to the English language learners, this is hugely helpful to the refugee population.

Thierry: So when we talk about English class, ESL, that we have to do that in 10 days, so one of the things that one of the things that happened is, sometimes we have refugees who arrive and in the middle of the semester, or at the end of the semester, or all the school that I mean, the local school, start started their semester, or they don't have any more support for new people. So what we do, we work with community partners, especially, I mean, volunteers from the community, that's mean majority of them, they're retired people, retired teachers, retired, professional. And these people what they do, so we train them, and we give them material to use, so that they can give kind of what we call survival English for our refugees, who are in need of English, because English is important for their, for them to be self-sufficient in this area. So we we have that also that that work hand-in-hand with their schooling, so schools in the area, so in case, their school does not have a spot right away. So we make sure that we have someone who is working with our client in that time until the school has a spot for them.

Host: Well, thank you all for talking about the specific programs that you offer that reach the specific needs of your communities, but also the general ways in which you provide educational services and even starting to talk about those partnerships with the local adult education services or local community partners who are providing educational services and really stressing that 10 day window that you all are required to make sure that your clients are enrolled in those programs, which is very different from how adult education operates. But then also bringing up that that question and the need for your clients because they don't come in needing services on the schedule of adult education. And so there is some some gaps there where you all have clients, but then there are programs that have already started or don't have space. And so I think that really brings up a good conversation moving forward of how adult education can really help support and partner to fulfill those needs. So yeah, this was a really good introductory conversation and I just didn't know if any of you, we started talking about connecting clients with adult educational opportunities, but I didn't know if you are wanting to expand on that or had anything to add about that specific aspect about connecting your clients with educational opportunities outside of what you offer.

Laurel: This is Laurel from Catholic Charities, MRS. So typically we assess clients and determine what trainings or certifications they may need in order to increase their employability and also to help them really move back into something related to their field, their education and background. We look for classes that are in close proximity to where they live, or maybe classes that are accessible online. And we also consider affordability. With our program, we can work with clients for up to five years. So this is one of the advantages, we may have a newcomer that arrives with very limited English proficiency, but with a strong educational and professional

background. So our first step would be to help them improve their English. And then once they achieved a sufficient level of English to take training, then we would be able to refer them.

So we have an example of a teacher from Afghanistan. When she first arrived, she had very limited English proficiency. So we enrolled her in ESL classes. Once her English was a high intermediate, we were able to refer her into a childcare for ESL class following the class. Once she had her credential, CPR, first aid, we were able to help her get a job in a daycare. And just yesterday, she applied, well, we assisted her with applying for a job in the school system in Prince William County Schools, and she's going to be hired as a classroom aide. So we can really help a client over a longer term period and with the end goal of really helping them to use their skills and background and education to connect back into their field. And really to be able to find success in a labor market here. Recently, we had several clients take part in a Amazon Web Service fiber optic fusion splicing training offered through Northern Virginia Community College. And this was a two day certification that led to some of our clients being hired into jobs that pay \$29 to \$30 an hour. So our goal is really to increase their employability and really help them to become self-sufficient. In Northern Virginia, cost of living is very high. So we really want to be able to help our clients to utilize their skills and backgrounds, you know, to, to increase their earning potential and, and to be able to use their skills and talents in the best way possible. So I think one of the best things about our program is it is it is five years from their date of arrival or grant of asylum. So through our employment programs, we can really help them, you know, to springboard and move back into their fields and, you know, become gainfully employed and part of our labor market.

Host: This has been just just a really good conversation for I think, for us to hear. And I'm excited for our adult education practitioners as well, because I'm just hearing a lot of shared goals and objectives, talking about orienting these populations to life and culture and work in the United States. Career Pathways has been mentioned a couple of times, which is always a focus in our field as well. So it's just really exciting to hear, you know how our goals and our objectives are really overlapping. And so to kind of expand on that a little bit. We wanted to hear a little bit more about or really just really understand the process that needs to happen in order to create partnerships between organizations like yours, refugee resettlement organizations, and adult education providers. So our next questions are, how do you develop partnerships with educational institutions? And how should adult education programs go about creating a partnership with a refugee resettlement agency?

Laurel: This is Laurel from Catholic Charities, MRS. So as I mentioned earlier, you know, it's our goal is really to connect clients to training opportunities that will help make them more marketable in the job market. We often work with the local community colleges, or training providers such as the community adult education programs through the counties. We also always try to work with training providers who are already approved by the WIOA program, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. But we we all welcome educational institutions to connect with us to share opportunities for clients. We, our goal is really to connect our clients to not only ESL programs, but also to training programs. So we are always open and excited to learn about training opportunities for our clients. So we we would love to be able to connect with partners,

particularly I would say for us, is trainings, healthcare trainings. For example, currently, we have two foreign trained medical doctors who are interested in surgical assistant training. And it's been a challenge for us to find providers that offer this type of training. So we're always looking for, you know, leads and connections to training providers, so we absolutely look forward to opportunities to partner.

Kristen: This is Kristen in Newport News. Yeah, I think I think I really wish that, you know, these adult education providers would know how much time resettlements staff spends on trying to make these connections and relationships, not just settling management, too. I mean, we're constantly, some of the ways we connect is even just going, you know, being present at forums, there's this great nonprofit forum that we attended just last week, and there were 100 nonprofits there. And then just that one setting, we were able to talk to, you know, local human service staff and there were housing coalitions, and there was a free, you know, medical clinic that provided free services. And so just, we do our best to get out and we do, we're so eager to connect more and, you know, open up more opportunities for refugees. I mean, a refugee office cannot work in an insular fashion at all, we just don't have the manpower. So, you know, an example of that is, is, you know, we can't develop a digital literacy curriculum. So we work with the local Literacy for Life, who will bring their specialty and their skills, you know, through us, and then and then we refer to them. So it's a great bilateral symbiotic relationship. We also have like a co-sponsorship, this is kind of new for the resettlement network, it's called co-sponsorship. And that's where a group can actually, not legally binding, but they they have an MOU, and they can work with a resettlement agency to kind of take off some of those core services.

And I think that also helps build those relationships that we talked about before, which then often leads to being connected to someone who is hiring, for example, or someone who, who like has a car that they can donate. So this co-sponsorship opportunities have been very, very helpful to the resettlement network, I think. And I think it's just really important for partners to be aware of the fact that all refugees, like they have to be connected to these services within timeframes, right. So as we said, it's like 10 days for ESL, it's 30 days for employment, school, the kids have to be in school within 30 days. And sometimes there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes that the community doesn't see. But it's really important. So we we all have to provide this information on employment and trainings that they attend and the attendance hours, we have to give that information to the state refugee coordinating office. And the more information we can give them, the better, because the states take that information, and they bring it to their governor, for example, or they're able to pass that information on to population for refugee migration, which might, in the long run, you know, be able to positively impact and influence the number of refugees that are able to come into the country the next fiscal year. So I think it's really, really important for the providers to know that, yes, like refugees, they do have to be involved with things and they're linked to resettlement agency that needs that information back. And I think sometimes it's hard to get that information. We want the ESL hours, we want to know. Yeah, like what trainings if they were given funding by view, if we don't know about it, can we get that information back somehow, because we want to share that, we want to share that upwards to the state coordinators. So I think that's just something that a message I always tried to get out to our partners to is share that information if you if you all know it.

Laurel: So this is Laurel again from CCD MRS. We have quarterly and sometimes bi-monthly community meetings referred to as the Virginia Community Capacity Initiative. And this is where community partners and all of the resettlement agencies come together to update on arrival patterns. We talk about our projected arrival numbers coming into the state. And we also have opportunities for partners to come and present about programs and share resources. So we would welcome training providers, community colleges to attend and to share information about their programs. It's just a good forum for all the resettlement agencies and the community compartment the community partners to connect, and each locality in the state of Virginia has, has these Virginia Community Capacity Initiative, refugee dialogue group meetings. So we would really encourage training providers, community colleges to connect with their settlement agencies, so that they can share information about their offerings, courses, certification programs and trainings, this would be a huge benefit. Because as Kristen mentioned earlier, sometimes we're searching for different programs and training partners in ESL program. So this would be a good forum, you know, to share that information. Yeah,

Thierry: This is Thierry from CWS, Harrisonburg as Laura and Kristen say, we need, I mean, we at CWS we have the same thing. The same meeting consultation that happened every month with the community partners and stakeholders. But as they say, we need this to go from one level to another level where we have, especially where we have big colleges because like in Harrisonburg, we have three to four colleges and we have one community colleges. But the most people are, we kind of connect a lot or work directly in Massanutten Technical Center, and also Blue Ridge and Skyline Literacy was for English and skill trade at Massanutten. But we would like to get much in the meeting, we some people from those colleges attended a meeting but we would rather have them for a I would say enough frequent or often and get more involvement from there and and understand what the refugees need. Because as they said, we have some refugees who comes here with big experiences from their countries and big degrees, but they cannot use them here because of licensing and the processes of getting rid of releases, the, it's kind of very long. And sometimes people don't understand it. And sometimes we don't even know how to tell them their pathway to take for them to be this licensed again. So when we can have these kinds of partnerships with, especially with big colleges, that will be helpful because I think some of them have this kind of information. But we do have we do have a partnership with MTC, Massanutten Technical Center, we work like, together wherever whenever we have a project that we want to start so we reach out to them and if sometimes we have a project that have worked together with them, and so we have to involve them and have their insight on the project. So we work hard on and the same with Skyline Literacy. Those two, we work closely.

Host: Well, I really appreciate the example partnerships that you all share that you all do currently have going on. Kristen, I know in your area there, you're, you've been working with the adult ed program and Literacy for Life. So I think those examples are really good models to share. So I really appreciate that. But also, you know, letting us know what opportunities are available for our programs to really take to be able to connect better with refugee resettlement agencies. And I just really appreciate this idea of, like what Kristen said, with the digital literacy

curriculum, like that's something that adult ed can do, that can really help benefit the services that a refugee resettlement agency has to provide. And I also really appreciate you all sharing those requirements around your services. I think that that's really important for our programs to understand as well as like, what the timeframes that you're that you're looking for the data that you need. And one big thing that's happening in adult ed in Virginia is we are getting a new data system, the state has purchased it, and it is going to function a lot better for the needs of our programs. But this is really good information to have, as that system has been developed so that we can think about how can we easily extract that information from our systems and get it back to our partners, because we understand the importance of data for sure. And how much of that needs to be shared as widely as it can be.

I think finally, we really just wanted to provide you all with the opportunity to share what you might want to know about adult education or from adult education programs. Just to give our programs an idea of like when they do come to you what information are you looking for? And you know, what do you need to know about them in order to develop that partnership. So if anyone has anything to share that you would like to know about adult ed or from programs.

Laurel: This is Laurel from CCDA MRS. So as I mentioned earlier, we do have a lot of interest in IT training. And we have a lot of interest in HVAC, plumbing in the trades. And of course I mentioned healthcare certifications. So we'd love to learn more about those programs. For my programs specifically in Northern Virginia, we'd love to know more about training programs that exist in those areas. And then another area that I wanted to mention is the barriers that our clients face to accessing adult education. The obvious are transportation, childcare and language. We do have an ESL provider in the city of Alexandria, the Campagna Center, which actually provides childcare. So this was a huge help to many of our newcomer families who have small children in the home. Also, offering remote classes has also removed barriers that sometimes clients face to accessing ESL classes. And, you know, with, when we have clients who don't have a car or driving license, being able to have them connect remotely has been hugely helpful. The resettlement agencies do have resources to provide technology at home for clients such as Chromebooks, laptops, and helping them connect to low cost and free internet services. So those are things that we can provide. But the the opportunity to learn from home has been great, it's it's been able to, it's just a much more inclusive way to make sure that, you know, there are no barriers from connecting to you know, ESL classes and other other training providers.

Thierry: This is Thierry from Harrisonburg CWS. During the COVID time, we had a grant to sorry, we had a grant to pay for laptop and phones to refugees who have been living here less than five years. But since last year and October, so we no longer have that fund. So it's a little bit tricky for for us to help refugees who want to learn from home and learn English or other online classes remotely. And so that's kind of, it was a huge relief for us because it was helping a lot because most of our refugees don't have transportation and transportation is a big, big barrier for all refugees arriving in the area. So if we can get, I don't know, get a service or an institution that can provide transportation to refugees, though will be a really, really helpful thing. And also another barrier that we are facing is childcare. As Laurel said, I'm glad that they have it

in Northern Virginia, but we don't have it here in Harrisonburg. If we can have that, that will be a huge relief for our women who want to go to school but can't because of children. And, oh, one thing that I would like to know about adult education institution, we, we have one that provides a kind of a lot of trading skills. It's like, electric, mechanic. But there is one that most men from the refugee community want is the CDL Class. And all of them when you ask them, what do you want to do in the future, they say we want to be CDL driver. And to be a CDL driver, you have to be someone who speak good English. And that's hard for them. That's hard on them, because most of them work like 12 hour shifts and Monday to Sunday. And they don't have that time to go for ESL class because they have to take care of their families. So but with that experience that we had with Blue Ridge of the ESL support, the CDL supported ESL classes, it was it was a huge success. So we would love to have those kinds of classes in the area. Not that, not that just for one time, but like something that is always there. Thank you.

Kristen: This is Kristen, in Newport News, I think I'd like to know if there is just like a place online like a zip code finder or something like that, where you could, just because we serve a big area, we serve Hampton Roads. I mean, our office is located in Newport News, but we resettle from Williamsburg out to I mean, technically even Eastern Shores within I mean, we don't resettle there, but we could. So it'd be really nice. If there's just something we could like plug in and like, bam, all these, you know, our providers pop up. But I think and then and then of course, if there was a way for providers to just make it really clear if if these training certification courses etc, are, are available to or populations, because there's been times sure we pursued something and then we found out after doing a lot of groundwork that it was oops, like you have to be a citizen to access these, these services. So So knowing what those are again, are really are really helpful. And I'd like to know if I mean, again, if within the Hampton Roads area, I mean, we are connected to several, but if people would be willing to come to our site, like our clients feel safe when we can host at our site, because they know us they know the space. And we can gather good numbers of people to host sessions on site. So if anyone wanted to, we are so open and welcoming of that.

And then just the last thing, I always try to say this whenever I have the opportunity, is if adult ed programs are coming across refugees, second migrants, asylees, victims of trafficking, any of these populations that we've talked about, I really hope that they like pick up the phone or just or let their local resettlement office know, because we don't always know of because we talked about the different pathways before, right. So we know about people who fly in because we pick them up at the airport. But we don't always know about asylum seekers. We don't know that someone who moved in from California is now living, you know, four miles from us. And so we really rely on those, you know, those connections and those and those tips and because those those people are, you know, there's services that they're entitled to through resettlement and there's funding, we have lots of funding that we can pay out to ORR folks. So yeah, just we love those referrals from external partners.

Laurel: This is Laurel from CCDA MRS. Just a couple of other best practices. In my experience, in addition to the ESL provider providing childcare, we did have one ESL provider in the Fredericksburg area that had a space in a neighborhood where many of the clients lived. This

was hugely successful because the clients could walk there, it was in their neighborhood, they felt comfortable. And then also they offered classes in the morning and evening to adapt to, you know, many of our clients, of course, they have to be working and they have varying work schedules. And then on a sort of different topic, we do find that you know, we do our best to assess our clients and their English language level, to make sure they can complete a course and training programs successfully. But we do encourage training providers to take that initiative as well. You know, as Kristen mentioned, we do have funding and resources to help cover the cost of the training. But we want it to be successful, we don't want the clients to be frustrated and demoralized if they can't get through it. So you know that that assessment piece is really important and critical to help the the clients complete the training successfully.

Host: Thank you all for for those questions, and pointing out. Thierry, did you want to add something?

Thierry: Um, just one last thing, something that I would like, it's kind of a request that had no, it's not easy education program. But it's, most of our immigrant, because we want them to be self-sufficient. So we started with English and then driving licenses. And sometimes it's very hard for them to get the driving licenses because of the language barrier. So how, I would wish that DMV would make it much easier for refugees. Especially those who come here with their driving license from their country, to after they pass, their Learner's Permit to get it right away. And instead of waiting six, two months, and waiting for the behind of the wheel test. So that will be much helpful.

Host: Guests thank you all for, for your questions and requests and just ideas of things that you're thinking about, about ways that adult education can help partner, such as, you know, providing information of learners that adult ed comes across, that you all could also serve and provide services to. Some of the barriers you all mentioned are, of course, huge barriers within adult education and transportation and childcare are two largest barriers. But there are, like you all mentioned, maybe some creative ways to remove some of those barriers, which is going to the resettlement agencies or going into the neighborhoods to work with learners there. So yeah, I think this information has been exceptionally helpful. And then also, Kristen with your mention of a provider directory. And I know that's something that we are very passionate about, and we are working on. And hopefully we'll have soon, because I think there are so many agencies, there's community based organizations, there's literacy organizations, there's faith organizations, there's educational institutions, there's the resettlement agencies, there's all these agencies that are serving very similar populations in various ways. And if we can really come together to to kind of spread those services, then we could really probably serve more people, serve people in a more holistic way. So I think a lot of what you all have shared have kind of pointed to that need. And so we do really appreciate all the information that you've provided the questions that you've raised. And so I just wanted to open it up if there was anything else that you all wanted to share before we kind of closed out for today.

Laurel: This is Laurel with MRS. We really, really appreciate the community partners, the training provider providers being our partners with helping our clients to integrate and become

self-sufficient. And we just also want to share that, you know, many of these newcomers they are they really have motivation and drive to be to have good careers, to learn English. They're so eager to take part in opportunities to improve themselves to learn, you know, to gain certifications and skills. So we just really look forward to being able to connect them to more to more programs. And the directory is a great idea. I really hope that comes to fruition because we have big teams of employment specialists, career coaches, who are always looking for these opportunities for newcomers. So we'd love to connect and again, you know, I can't emphasize enough how eager and interested our newcomer clients are to learning English and to be gaining, you know, in demand job skills here in Virginia. So we're really grateful for this opportunity to talk and explore options and opportunities. So thank you

Kristen: Totally an oddball comment, but I'll just say that I mean, in addition to all these great educational, you know, initiatives are providing where we definitely are, I think all resettlement agencies are also trying to explore and grow their housing opportunities, which is often tied to financial assistance through programs and analyze programs are through adult ed and or through your local, you know, DSS offices, so I'm always willing to have a phone call with somebody, there's a lenient landlord out there property management group that is interested in, in hearing about refugee resettlement. And yeah, just wanted to say, thanks for this opportunity. And it's been such a pleasure to be here to talk about this. And thanks to everybody in Virginia, who, who supports refugee resettlement in their local resettlement offices.

Thierry: Yeah, thank you for letting us share our works in our area. And it was good for me to learn from others and what they're doing in their programs. And to learn what we can do in here and to learn the good thing that you are doing. So thank you.

Host: Great. Again, we just want to thank you all for joining us today. We know that this is a really important opportunity for our programs to hear from and learn from other organizations who are serving adult learners across the state. Additionally, we want our listeners to know that we will post our guest speakers' contact information and related resources along with this podcast on our VALRC website. And so please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions or need any additional information related to this topic. Thank you for joining.