

Meeting held at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center

Attendees: Hari Adhikari, Amela Begovic, Beth Broadway, Mark Cass, Donald Kates, Melody Holmes, Stephanie Horton, Don MacLaughlin, Pat MacLaughlin, Brian Moore, Dr. Cynthia Morrow, Rachel Pollack, Paul Predmore, Bagawat Pyakumel, Dominic Robinson, Dzenan Selimovic, Jai Subedi, Sandra Whittaker.

Co-chairs: Heidi Holtz & Kristen Mucitelli-Heath

OCL: Sandra Barrett

Summary

This second “first” Onondaga Citizens League (OCL) 2012 Study Committee meeting served as an introduction to committee members to the purpose of OCL and the study committee, who were then tasked with brainstorming for the 2012 study topic: “The World at Our Doorstep” (working title), which focuses on the refugee population in Onondaga County.

Introduction

Kristen welcomed the group and asked individuals to briefly introduce themselves. Kristen said that the study committee hopes to have standing, bi-weekly meetings and asked that everyone note inside their name tents the times that are impossible or difficult for them to meet.

OCL/Study Committee—Sandra described the purpose of the OCL and explained that conducting a study on an issue of critical importance to the community is the main function of OCL. The issue of refugee resettlement was selected this year by the OCL Board because of its importance and timeliness, and to build upon the groundwork that would be laid by a working group convened by the Gifford Foundation to begin to collect data on the refugee populations. The Working Group includes a number of stakeholders who work with refugees who are beginning an assessment of current activities and services. The group’s goal is a dashboard of information on process and services.

The role of the OCL Study Committee was described. The process begins with clearly defining the issue and the specific policy questions to be addressed. The study committee then decides how fact-finding for the study will be conducted, and what research methods will be used based on the questions it hopes to address. Research might include, for instance: reading reports; presentations by study committee members, expert witnesses, or outside expertise; and formal or informal surveys.

“Department of Grundsatzfragen” (Fundamental Questions)

Heidi explained that as part of the first task, defining the study, committee members in the first meeting were asked to visit four brainstorming stations to pose questions and ideas to four areas of inquiry listed below. The sheets that were used

to record the questions/ideas that were discussed at the first meeting were posted around the room. Heidi suggested that people get up and circulate around the room, adding their own questions, or agreement, with each question.

During discussion, there was general agreement that the focus should be less on how the refugees come to terms with resettlement and adjustment and more about how the community could be welcoming. Refugee resettlement should be seen as an opportunity, not a burden, and the study should seek to discover the conditions that lead to successful outcomes, including but not limited to economic benefit to the community. It was pointed out that the refugee experience is not uniform and there is much diversity in the population. Part of the purpose of the study should be to get at the facts and disseminate the facts to correct the myths and incorrect assumptions that are held even people who are somewhat informed. The study should include representatives of groups organized by the refugees themselves.

Kristen said the Working Group has identified five categories: crime/safety, housing, jobs, health, and literacy. Within each focus area selected to study we might look at myth v. fact, case studies or personal stories, and identified needs and gaps. Heidi added that to include the general public in the study process we might include a film and discussion series, oral histories gathered by the OHA and national issues forums. World Refugee Day is June 23 and there will be community events tied to that date.