

Onondaga Citizens League

2012 Study Committee Notes—Meeting on September 27, 2012

Meeting held at PEC, 620 James St., Syracuse

Attendees: Muna Al-Any, Felicia Castricone, Pam Heintz, Stephanie Horton, Sarah McIlvain, Don MacLaughlin, Helen Malina, Beth Broadway, Jonnell Robinson, Peter Sarver, Lois Schroeder, Olive Sephuma, Sarah Walton, Lisa Warnecke, Yi Yu, Nancy Zarach

Co-chair: Kristen Heath

OCL: Sandra Barrett, Becky Sernett

OCL Study Committee Schedule

The study committee schedule for October will be as follows:

- Tuesday, Oct. 9 at 9 a.m.—PEC, 620 James St.
- Thursday, Oct. 25 at 12 Noon—PEC, 620 James St.

Future Events

Fall Film Festival—The refugee film schedule is: October 2, 16 and 30 at 7 p.m. Film showings will be free and open to the public. They will be held at Progressive Expert Consulting's (PEC) Inspiration Hall (formerly St. Peter's Church), located at the corner of James and Catherine streets in Syracuse.

Meeting Summary

The study committee conducted a brainstorming session to review what has been learned over the past seven months. Members shared their ideas anonymously on sticky notes, which were posted on the room's walls for everyone to read, and then some of these ideas were discussed in the larger group. A brief overview of the next steps in the study process was also discussed. A complete record of the stickie notes is available on the OCL Website.

Brainstorming Session

Co-chair Kristen Heath directed the session, announcing that the study was now moving toward the final product, the writing of the report. To help shape the report, the committee would be reviewing its activities during this and the next several meetings.

For today's meeting, members were asked to brainstorm ideas in regards to the following questions:

- What have we learned? What has emerged?
- What are the successes or particular competencies for refugee resettlement in our area?
- What opportunities could we pursue?
- What did this study miss that could be studied further?

Before the brainstorming session began, Lisa Warnecke asked about the report-writing process and whether or not there would be a larger analysis of the

committee's work. She said it was difficult for many members, who were volunteers, to spend too much time doing this analytical work. Heath said that an outline of the report would be available within a month. Jonnell Allen, an assistant professor of geography at Syracuse University, said she and a team of interns were helping to analyze the committee's work.

Next, members wrote their ideas on sticky notes, which were posted on the room's walls. A record of the ideas is on the OCL Website. The bulk of the meeting was spent writing ideas. Then, the committee walked around the room reading the notes, and a brief discussion followed.

Heath asked if anyone saw "fact-based" inaccuracies on the notes that should be addressed first. Felicia Castricone from Catholic Charities said one note referred to thousands of refugees coming into Syracuse annually, and this number isn't correct. According to the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration: 827 refugees were resettled in Syracuse in 2011. Heath reassured the committee that the report would contain accurate numbers.

Stephanie Horton from Bob's School questioned a note that said resettlement services were "fragmented". As a representative of one of the agencies, she didn't think that comment was accurate. Heath said that it was her understanding from the meetings that the resettlement agencies interact and communicate more than she had thought before the study began. A discussion ensued about "subjective" comments and how these should be handled in the report.

Allen referred the committee to a note that said refugees were "overwhelming" the school district. She said from her reading of the notes, this didn't seem to be the case. Sandra Barrett said this could be similar to the "fragmented" comment—a situation where one person's definition of "overwhelming" (or "fragmented") might differ from someone else's, and that these types of adjectives would be treated with care in the report to reflect the facts.

Allen also pointed to a stickie that said middle schoolers are suffering in school because they are taken out of classes to attend their ESL classes. "Do we have data to support this?" she asked.

Heath and Barrett reassured committee members that the report would be accurate and any misrepresentation of data or inaccurate generalizations would not be included.

Sarah McIlvain said that a fellow committee member questioned her when she wrote on her stickie that cultural sensitivity among police officers is on the "upswing." She explained that her opinion takes into consideration how the department operated before it incorporated the refugee ID cards, etc. There has been progress, she said.

Peter Sarver said that some discrepancies among members' opinions may be a case of perspective: Some people may view the glass as "half-full" and others as "half-empty." Service providers, he said, may view progress as being "half-full," while outsiders may say "half-empty."

Beth Broadway from Interfaith Works said she appreciated the notes that recognized the important roles that Ethnic Community Based Organizations play. "These are opportunities that are just beginning," she said.

Heath asked committee members to consider conducting research for national "best practices" for discussions at future meetings. She said it's important to recognize not only what Syracuse is doing well, but also what other communities are doing well in terms of refugee resettlement. What are the innovative ideas? What are the opportunities? How do other people do it?

Helen Malina from Interfaith Works said that there is a lot of information online. "Refugee resettlement agencies do care about best practices nationally," she said.

The next OCL study committee meeting will be on Oct. 9, at 9 am at PEC.