



# Webinar: Supporting Resettlement Workers with Lived Experience: Individual, Organizational, and Policy-Level Strategies

June 6, 2024, 3:00 – 4:15 PM ET

Transcript

## Introduction

**Caroline Dilts:** Good afternoon and welcome, everyone. Thank you all for joining today to engage in this very important topic of supporting resettlement workers with lived experience. During this webinar, we'll present research on this topic as well as hear from a panel of experts on their experiences and their recommendations for individual, organizational, and policy-level strategies.

## Today's Speakers

**CD:** My name is Caroline Dilts and I am the program manager at the Boston College School of Social Work's Research Program on Children and Adversity. And I have the pleasure of introducing our wonderful speakers today.

**CD:** So our first speaker, Rochelle Frounfelker, is an assistant professor in the College of Health at Lehigh University. She's a social epidemiologist who uses mixed methods to investigate the life course impact of social and environmental adversities on psychiatric disorders among marginalized populations. She implements new or adapted evidence-based interventions to reduce negative mental health outcomes and assesses the effectiveness of interventions in clinical and community settings. She earned her MSW and MPH from Columbia University and her ScD from Harvard Chan School of Public Health.

**CD:** Farhad Sharifi is a recent Afghan evacuee who was initially at Camp Atterbury. He is a social worker working as a cultural expert in the Family Strengthening Intervention for Refugees Project at the Research Program on Children and Adversity at Boston College. Previously, he worked with internally displaced populations in Afghanistan with Jesuit Refugee Services.

**CD:** Chelsea Lafferty is the director of refugee services at Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton Counties in Lansing, Michigan. She provides complete oversight to the Reception and Placement, Matching Grant, Refugee Social Services, Post-Resettlement, Preferred Communities, and Health Promotion programs for refugee services at Catholic Charities. Chelsea is integral in the development of new programs at Catholic Charities to better support refugees in the Lansing community. Her areas of passion are immigration integration and inclusion, cultural humility, and mental health and wellness.

**CD:** Zohra Danish is an Afghan family strengthening interventionist and an in-home educator and health navigator for Afghan families, also at Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton Counties in Lansing.



She's fluent in three languages, Dari, Pashto, and English. Zohra has a passion for building rapport, trust, and new futures with the whole refugee community in Lansing. Her aspiration is to earn a higher degree in a major of her choosing.

**CD:** Ali Tarokh is a director of policy and advocacy at Trellis, a nonprofit organization serving refugee and immigrant families in the Chicago area. Prior to this role, he served as a case manager and earned his master's degree in political science. Ali is pursuing a doctorate in law and policy with his dissertation focused on refugee employment barriers. He also contributes to public discourse through op-eds published in outlets such as the Chicago Tribune and Huntington News, shedding light on refugee challenges and advocating for their rights.

## Learning Objectives

**CD:** So we'll go over the learning objectives now. By the end of the session, we hope that you'll be able to explain the importance and impact of having a diverse and representative resettlement staff; identify the unique challenges experienced by resettlement workers who themselves come from a refugee or newcomer background; apply key organizational and individual strategies to support resettlement staff from refugee and newcomer backgrounds; and plan and advocate for more equitable systemic policies and organizational practices for resettlement staff from refugee or newcomer backgrounds.

## Poll Question

**CD:** Alright, so we are going to start with a Slido just to introduce ourselves and see who's on our webinar today. So if you could, scan the QR code or join at [slido.com](https://slido.com) and put in this code. We want you to answer this question of,

[What is your current job role and responsibilities?](#)

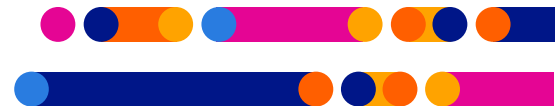
**CD:** We'll take a second to just see what comes from this. Looks like we have some agency supervisors or directors here and a lot of direct service providers and other as well. Great. Well, thank you so much for engaging. We have one more Slido too before we get started. So we'll just go ahead and go to that one.

## Discussion Question

[What brings you to this webinar?](#)

**CD:** So, again, if you'd like to please just scan the QR code or join at [slido.com](https://slido.com) with the code, we would love to hear what brings you to the webinar.

**CD:** Sounds like some... there's some staff turnover going on. People really want to support staff in their agencies. That's great. Understand more about this topic. It sounds like we have a lot of supervisors here who are really wanting to learn more and enhance the support. This is all wonderful stuff, great community of learning here today. All right, I'll give it one more second. Great. Sounds like we also have a couple people with lived experience who also want to improve their practice, so that's wonderful. I think we can probably go ahead and get started. So I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Rochelle who's going to begin the first section of our presentation today. Thank you all for engaging.



## 1. Resettlement Workers with Lived Experience: Overview, Definitions, and Statistics

**Rochelle Frounfelker:** Hi, everyone. I'm excited to be here this afternoon, and I'm really excited to see the wealth of experience and perspectives of people that are attending today. Can't wait to hear your thoughts as we go along. So I just really wanted to spend a little bit at the beginning just providing an overview on this topic broadly about resettlement workers with a lived experience, just really to set the groundwork for the discussion that we'll be having and getting more in depth on some of the issues that are really important that you yourself raised about providing support and advocating for this workforce.

### What do we mean by “staff with lived experience”?

**RF:** So the first thing I want to do with the next slide is just to make sure we're all working with, maybe this is obvious, but to say, what is our shared definition that we are working with today in terms of our panel, and what do we even mean by “staff with lived experience”? So for us, what we're saying is we're identifying that as resettlement staff who identify as either a refugee or an immigrant or a newcomer more broadly and that they themselves underwent in the past or are currently undergoing the resettlement process themselves, such as thinking about the different categories and groups and where people might be coming from and where they themselves are at in terms of their resettlement experience and journey here in the United States.

### Current State of U.S. Resettlement

**RF:** Here I just want to present an overview of where we are today and why should we be thinking about this topic of resettlement workers with lived experience? So currently in fiscal year 2023, more than 60,000 refugees were resettled in the United States, which is the largest number of resettlement since fiscal year 2016. So there is a greater need more than ever to work with this population and address the diverse needs of new arrivals. There were policy changes that were previously made by the federal government to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which led to some limited funding for resettlement organizations, which was then reversed during a change of administration, causing a rebuilding period for the field and a strong need for a skilled workforce to serve this influx of new arrivals. And when we think about new arrivals, thinking about, certainly as we have here, thinking about new arrivals from Afghanistan, but also other populations including Ukraine, Cuba, Haiti, and other refugee groups which you yourselves I'm sure are experiencing and working with in your own work.

### Economic Impact of Refugees and Newcomers

**RF:** Next, I just want to share and be thinking about the economic impact of refugees and newcomers in the United States. And there was a report conducted by the American Immigration Council in 2023 that assessed the economic impact of refugees and found that while refugees represent a small segment of the U.S. population, their contribution to the economy as earners and taxpayers is really significant.

**RF:** This report also found that about 15.2% of refugee workers were currently employed in the health care and social assistance industries. So, thinking more specifically about, of this workforce, how many individuals in this size of the population that may have the skillsets that resettlement agencies are looking for, can really add to their team.



## Benefits of a Diverse Workforce

**RF:** And you might be, and some of this you might say, myself, we work with diverse populations, but I also think... I always think it's useful to be thinking about like, why would it be of benefit in general to have a really diverse workforce in resettlement work? Thinking about, first off, it promotes creativity and innovation. Certainly when people from different backgrounds come together, they have a variety of life experiences, and they might really see the world in unique ways. And you're bringing multiple perspectives to the table, which really can lead to an increase in creativity and problem solving.

**RF:** Another important bonus and benefit of a diverse workforce is professional growth. So we think diverse teams can be professionally enriching when teammates are exposed to new skills and approaches to work. And additionally, if you have a really diverse workforce, colleagues may have the opportunity to develop international networks. Teammates are learning about each other's culture, which really is leading to a more broad understanding of the world on a deeper level, which in turn can filter different perspectives into their own thinking and creating new thoughts and new ideas.

**RF:** It also helps to provide culturally appropriate services. And we have to really think about, of course, in the value of resettlement work, that while it's always incredibly valuable to have individuals that speak the same language of the individuals that you are serving and providing services to in your organization, I think more broadly, the importance of thinking about providing, outside of language, culturally informed and culturally appropriate services and care. And the individuals who know that best are the people that are from that community. And as much as I can read up on a culture and try to understand and figure out what the dynamics might be, what the needs are going to be and what's going on, the people that are absolutely best positioned to provide that information and really lead the way are individuals who are from that background themselves.

**RF:** And finally, I think ultimately having a diverse workforce can really facilitate better decision-making overall. When we have diverse teams, we have diverse and different perspectives, we're bringing a lot more information to the table. And while sometimes some of those voices and perspectives of people from different cultures may be a bit contradictory, I think at the end of the day, if we hear all these different perspectives and decide what our next move is going to be for your team or your organization, we're going to ultimately have organizations and teams and services that are more effective and more efficient and successful.

## 2. Common Challenges for Resettlement Workers with Lived Experience

**RF:** So next I want to turn and spend a few minutes talking about, what are some of the common challenges for resettlement workers, and be thinking about when we start talking about potential ways to support staff and policy and advocacy issues to be thinking about what are some of the concerns that you might be having? And again, I'm curious, I'm really excited to hear from you all about what else you might be interested in hearing about.

### Underemployment

**RF:** So first I want to talk about broadly the issue of underemployment. As we saw in the previous slide, there are 15.2% are estimated of refugees and working in health care and the social service industry.

**RF:** And refugees are frequently facing the issue of being underemployed, meaning that they work in jobs that don't take advantage of really the wide range of skillsets. And this can frequently happen because of licensing



issues and educational requirements here in the U.S. that maybe doesn't match based on their experience back in their home country. So really thinking about resettlement agencies as a place that you can tap into these diverse skillsets and use them to really support and benefit the work of your team.

### Re-traumatization and Vicarious Trauma

**RF:** And next I want to just speak a little bit about issues around re-traumatization and vicarious trauma. Want to position and think about re-traumatization as being defined as a person's reaction to a traumatic exposure that might be colored or intensified or amplified or shaped by one's reactions and their own adaptations to previous traumatic experiences that they themselves have had. For resettlement workers, this phenomenon may be more likely to occur in those with lived experience as a refugee or newcomer engaging in direct service work with their clients. Sometimes observing resettlement stressors or hearing stories from clients about their traumatic experiences might elicit a traumatic response and bringing back memories and intrusive thoughts or other symptoms that can have an impact, a negative impact on the resettlement worker themselves.

**RF:** Now, vicarious trauma, more specifically, describes the impact on an individual being continually exposed to other people's stories or experiences of trauma and violence. So this is a bit different from re-traumatization in that vicarious trauma is not about something triggering them from their own personal experience but just a continual exposure that can result in physiological symptoms that might end up resembling post-traumatic stress reactions and other mental health issues and distress among workers because of their exposures to the traumas of those individuals that they're trying to support.

### Compassion Fatigue

**RF:** And finally, thinking about the issue of compassion fatigue. And compassion fatigue is recognized as really an occupational hazard in the workplace, and doing psychosocial supports and resettlement work. A sign of burnout that might manifest itself in physical, emotional, or spiritual exhaustion. And there's actually a lack of research on the mental health consequences of resettlement work on direct service providers in terms of compassion fatigue. But there's some data that shows evidence that things such as having heavy caseloads, really emotionally demanding work, or limited resources and access to supports in the workplace can increase the probability of having compassion fatigue. And staff in this field who are also in the process of resettlement themselves might be more prone to experiences of compassion fatigue as they're managing their own personal stressors outside of the work environment related to their resettlement process.

### Discussion Question

**RF:** So, our next question for Slido is... really want to hear from you and,

[What work-related challenges have you observed or experienced in relationship to resettlement workers with lived experience?](#)

**RF:** And please share your thoughts. Right. People talking about trauma. Absolutely. Yeah. These are such great points. I think being a point person in which a lot of things are put on you in terms of being asked to interpret and be the point person, and really in high demand and high need, you have to think about what are all the things that this individual is really valuable in the workplace, but then how does that also add extra



stressors to them? Yeah, oh, maintaining boundaries is so difficult. I think it's certainly because you've had a lived experience, you might have... want and having been there yourself to understand the experiences.

**RF:** Having a hard time separating your work from your own personal time, and again, leading to a greater likelihood of something like compassion fatigue. Yeah, that's really interesting. And thinking about points of disclosure. Yeah, that's a really... I think that's really interesting in terms of how are, what supports do we provide resettlement workers with lived experience in terms of their use of self in their work? And the clinical work that I've done with people with other lived experiences of other mental health issues and things like that, I think that's also, that's really pertinent to be thinking about. And while... that identity of them is extremely valuable, what are the expectations and boundaries having in place? Yeah. Expectations and things like that. Yeah, these are all really great points, great points.

**RF:** Oh, that's really interesting. A lack of respect from clients who expect to work with U.S.-born staff. That's really interesting. I hadn't thought of that. Yeah. And then there's also certainly the aspect, as you point out, clients might have different expectations. What did they think they're going to get in terms of support from someone with lived experience? That's unfortunate. Yeah. Experiences of racism and discrimination, things like that. Okay. Well thank you so much for sharing, and I'm going to turn this over to my colleagues.

### 3. Hear from Our Speakers: Key Strategies to Support Resettlement Staff from Refugee and Newcomer Backgrounds

**CD:** Great. Thank you so much, Rochelle. So now we're going to transition into our next section, which will be on a panelist of our providers. So we now have the pleasure of hearing from our two provider panelists, Chelsea and Zohra, who work together at Catholic Charities in Lansing, Michigan. And they're going to provide some insight about some of the key strategies of supporting workers with lived experience on a supervisory and an individual level. So thank you again, Chelsea and Zohra, for being here. So my first question for both of you—and we can have Zohra go first or whatever works best for you guys—but,

[Can you each briefly describe your background and your current role in resettlement work?](#)

**Zohra Danish:** Hello, all. Good afternoon. I'm Zohra. I am an Afghan family strengthening interventionist at Catholic Charities in Lansing, Michigan. I work as an in-home educator and health navigator for Afghan families in Lansing, Michigan. I am passionate about building rapport, trust, and new future for the whole refugee community in Michigan. I came to the U.S. in 2019. I start in resettlement work as a volunteer interpreter during the Operation Allies Welcome in October 2021. And I was hired on as a full-time employee in December of 2022 to support the Afghan Family Strengthening interventionist program. Thank you so much, Caroline.

**Chelsea Lafferty:** Yeah, thanks, Caroline, for having us. We're very lucky to have Zohra as well on our team. But I am the director of refugee services at Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton, and Clinton Counties in Lansing, Michigan. And my name is Chelsea Lafferty—I should mention that as well. Well, I have had the pleasure of working in resettlement work since about 2011. I started as an intern at an affiliate office in Nashville, Tennessee. Worked my way up, worked as an employment specialist and youth school impact. Moved down to New Orleans, got a master's degree and worked at a resettlement agency there as well in New Orleans. Then spent some time in the DC area doing technical assistance and project management for the Center for Applied Linguistics around cultural diversity. And then I made my way to Lansing, Michigan to be the assistant director of refugee services and then director of refugee services. And I've been at Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton,



and Clinton Counties for a little over three years. Very happy to be serving the Lansing community in this capacity.

**CD:** Great. Thank you, both, for sharing a little more about where you come from. I think that's always really helpful for the audience to know before we dive into some of our other questions. So as you guys may have heard, Rochelle explained a lot about some of the challenges that are experienced by our refugee newcomers who come from a lived experience background and work in resettlement. So my question for both of you as well, and again, you can go one by one, however you guys feel, is,

[Could you] both share what [you] have observed or experienced to be some of the biggest barriers in resettlement work for these kind of workers?

**ZD:** Thank you, Caroline. I would like to say, to mention or point out two points that I personally myself had the experience. One of them is... was language barrier. Although I knew the language, but I did not always feel comfortable advocating for what I need. So sometimes you cannot explain what you mean, that causes an anxiety. I had a lot of fear around using the right word in a professional setting. I thought my colleagues might judge me or get offended based on the word that I use. And the second point is cultural and workplace norms or professional attitude. I had not ex... I had not worked in the U.S. in a professional office prior to joining CCIEC. So I had an anxiety around working, knowing workplace norms and professional attitudes. Thank you.

**CD:** Yeah, I can imagine that transition to be particularly difficult, as the U.S. system generally professional working environment works at a very fast pace and there's a lot of norms that people need to be aware of and... but yes, thank you for sharing, Zohra. So, Chelsea, we'd love to hear from you now.

**CL:** Yeah. So working in this, for this area, for over 14 years or so, I have observed some of the biggest barriers for folks with lived experience being... navigating technology. Sometimes the way that we utilize technology in the U.S., everything goes on your Outlook calendar. If it's not emailed, it didn't happen. And then if it's not case noted, you did not take the client to the grocery store and explain how to do about, go about doing, using their food stamps. If it's not in the case note, it didn't happen. So the high utilization of technology has been a barrier that I've noticed.

**CL:** Particularly also self-care and boundary setting. Rochelle mentioned this quite heavily. That's across the board, not just for staff that have lived experiences, but staff that also... any staff learning how to set some of those boundaries, how to reserve some of your energy and utilize that when really necessary, has been difficult.

**CL:** I know at St. Vincent Catholic Charities, we've focused a lot of time and energy into what does effective workplace boundaries look like with clients, and really try to be mindful about building out examples so they're readily available to staff. We also try to really encourage those core services, if you can go above and beyond do, but not at the detriment of your own mental health. So a lot around self-care, boundary setting. One conversation I'm often having with my colleagues is around how one lives in the community but also works with the community. That has been a difficult conversation to have, and kind of explain to new staff about, well, that person is a client, so you can't go have dinner with them. So how do they navigate being a staff member while also being in the community?

**CL:** There have been times when we've had to tell clients, "Hey, you can't contact us after hours unless it's an emergency." I often direct staff who are new to talk with staff that have a lot of years of experience to kind of





share their institutional knowledge around how they've navigated being in the community, but also working with the community and best practices that they've had. That's been really, really beneficial. That confidentiality piece also can be kind of difficult when you're maybe in a church or the mosque and a client walks up to you and by identifying them as a client, that would be breaching their confidentiality.

**CL:** So you, the way that you kind of go about that, we've talked about that at length. And I think Zohra can attest to that, within our own department, and what that looks like. And then learning to delegate some of those tasks—that can be really difficult for new staff or staff with lived experiences. Often they'll want to take on a lot of responsibility, to have a successful case, right off the top, right off the bat. And so really encouraging them, delegate some of those tasks. Other folks can do them for you, volunteers can do them, interns can do them. Save some of that energy.

**CD:** Thank you so much. Yeah, I mean, you brought up some really great strategies that are concrete. So I guess my next question is also just specifically for Chelsea,

[\[Are there\] any other practical strategies that are used at your agency or on a supervisory level to support staff with this experience? Any others?](#)

**CL:** Well, we have a really lengthy, diligent training plan. We do every year about a two-month in our all-staff meetings, two months of all-staff training where we take the first 15 minutes to touch on different topics. We also do bi-weekly supervision. So anyone, every supervisor meets with the folks that report to them bi-weekly. It really creates that opportunity to share those concerns or share issues that they're having and provide that good feedback loop.

**CL:** Where we're at, in our office, it's an open office, so there's no doors. I have a cubicle; Zohra has a cubicle. And often colleagues are very accessible, and we believe that that creates a really good working environment. So any staff member can stop by my desk and I can answer some questions. I can field concerns. Same with all of our other supervisors. So no one's kind of off in an office or off in a corner. We're all in a very communal space.

**CL:** Another thing that comes to mind is that teamwork mindset. We always refer to a client as “our clients,” not “your clients.” So just because it's assigned to maybe Zohra as the case manager doesn't mean Zohra is the end all, be all. It's all of our clients. And we're all working towards the collective goodness for that particular individual or member.

**CL:** We also really encourage staff to seek input and feedback from fellow colleagues. So it doesn't have to be the supervisors telling them set boundaries. It can be fellow colleagues providing good feedback and can be consulted on that. We are very lucky to have staff that have worked at the agency for 15, 30 years, eight years, and they have a good institutional knowledge of how they've been able to work in this field for very long periods of time. We really try to respect each other's roles in the process. So like we have a housing specialist, we have a housing assistant, they're the experts of that area. So instead of the case manager taking on all of those responsibilities, we have other folks that support those case... the case manager in different aspects of their job.

**CL:** All of our supervisors know their supervisees' roles, so they can fill in any time. We want folks to take vacation, we want folks to take sick time, and we really encourage that, but the supervisors must be willing and





able to do the job as well. And so we really have a mindset of, never ask a colleague or even a client to do something you're not willing to do. So we really try to keep that mindset as well.

**CD:** And flex time. You are not allowed to work over 40 hours. If you work over 40 hours and you're working with your supervisor on how to flex that time, flex time can create a lot of good opportunities for folks to recharge. Fridays are sometimes a little quiet in the office, that's why I love working all day on Friday. But you can, we also utilize calendars and we block off time so folks can't book maybe a case manager assistant for interpretation support because they've, they did a late night airport pickup, and so they're going home Friday afternoon to go be with their families. So just some tangible ways that we've... and practical strategies that we've utilized.

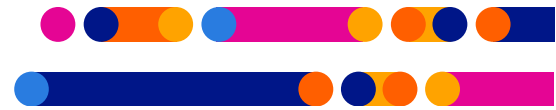
**CD:** These are all really wonderful and I know we've had a couple questions coming up in the chat, but we'll be able to answer some of those questions later on when we do a final Q&A. But thank you so much. So I guess my last question then is for Zohra. Excuse me. So, Zohra,

[Can you share what you have found to be helpful in your individual experience to combat some of those common problems that are faced by newly arrived resettlement workers?](#)

**ZD:** Thank you, Caroline. I would like to say, socializing, meeting friends and with community on the weekends, because back in Afghanistan, we all... We all grew up in an extended family or a big family. So, in an environment where socializing, gathering, greeting, learning is very common. Even that happens all the time. So, people who experience the cultural differences was the most helpful. Like we talking with them, that they came here, like five years ago, eight years ago, like meeting them and discussing about our concern with them or asking question from them. So it was very helpful. And overall I can say connection and networking and the community was extremely helpful for me.

**ZD:** And another point, ask a question, be humble and not afraid to ask for clarification and check in with the supervisor. My supervisor is available to be... if I have a difficult client or a situation I know I can call them anytime. It creates a space for me to express my feelings, and they're giving me feedback or ways to navigate certain situation. And also discussing with the, discussing challenges with the colleagues. For instance, I had a medical appointment, so I talked with my colleagues and my health coordinator. I had problem, I mean, problem or understanding the new words or medical terms. So I share my concern with them and they provide a medical term, a dictionary. So by reviewing or reading that dictionary, it really helps me. So, or utilizing resources or ask for what you need... it was very helpful for me. So I was always asking my director or supervisor especially like any challenges or any problem that I had. Thank you.

**CD:** Thank you so much. I really like that final point about asking questions. I think making sure that you guys have a workplace which fosters that kind of environment is essential for any workplace or even beyond resettlement work. I think that's just an essential piece and having the patience to answer questions, if you are a supervisor or a director. So thank you both so much. This has been wonderful. You've provided such insight and some really good concrete, specific strategies that you guys use and examples. So, I'm now going to go ahead and hand it over to my colleague Farhad to present a little on... a little more about some of those workplace solutions. And then we will engage with our policy panelist, Ali.



## 4. Workplace Solutions and Policy-Level Advocacy

**Farhad Sharifi:** Hello, everyone. I don't know if I can turn on my video. Yes. Okay, thank you, everyone, and thank you for giving me this opportunity. I'm honored to speak to you today. I'll be talking a few points about the agency level support strategies, followed by a discussion that I will have with my colleague Ali.

### Agency-Level Support Strategies

**FS:** So, a few points that I would like to start with, as considered best practices. Already, you might have been doing all of these practices, but it's a good reminder, I assume. So the first one is about supporting, having a supportive organizational culture, which means to create a sense of safety to employees, because they are working with clients who have... who might have complex trauma, and normalizing discussions about the emotional impact of their work is really important. I think encouraging vacation and time off is a good reminder because I assume that workaholicism could be a symptom of a sustaining trauma also. So that reminder is always a good point.

**FS:** And one last point in this regard, I guess, is to support and to help them continue their education, I guess is life changing. Myself, while I used to work at direct service provider setting, I get the opportunity because they encourage me to continue my higher education. I get the opportunity off of their encouragement to go and get my master degree in social work, which I'm really grateful for.

**FS:** The next very important point is the workload and the caseload that the workers are assigned to. It means that the administrators or supervisors can ensure that their staff has a manageable and balanced casework caseload, and just check with them if they're comfortable with this case or not. That is really important. And just because, within that environment, the staff who is working with each case, they might or the supervisor, they have an understanding of which cases are having, let's say, severe trauma, which one is not. And so having a balanced number of them, and just dividing them between the staff, I guess, is a good point.

**FS:** The next point is about the work environment itself, ensuring that the... where they work is safe, physically safe, and they are comfortable. They are not prone to any kind of threat from anyone. That is really important. This reminds me of a real scenario that I think I heard this from a director, that with good intentions, they had a collaborative with a research institute, and then both of these agencies had a target population to serve, and they hired the staff from the community, same community. But the thing was that these two new hired staff, which each of these agencies hired though they were from the same community, were from different caste, say one of them was from high caste the other from the lower caste. And that led to some difficulties. So all those is important. And the similar situation happened in a risk emergency in Maine within the Afghan population where the ethnicity was an issue. So that those cultural dynamics, of course, it's not, I think, ideal to just think that each population as flat, homogenous. There's very diverse diversity within each population also. And there could be dynamics, there could be oppression going on, and it's, I think it can shift and come to the work also. So it's very important to have discussions with the staff about all these dynamics.

**FS:** And then, next point about having some group support is very important. The social support is very beneficial for, just especially for the potential burnout. I like, for example, from our, where I work, we have this, they organize these social interactions through some events we go all together. I think that's a good practice. And then through that kind of space where we can socialize, we can have our questions, we can also chat. That creates a kind of cohesion and team building. I like, I really like that.



**FS:** And next of course, has to do with supervision. It is a key in prevention of some of these occupational hazards, and studies actually suggest that supervision can act as a protective factor because it can ensure early recognition and response to possible secondary traumas. So, supervision can be a space where the regular supervision, of course, to have regular supervision in place. It's really important and vital for the staff with lived experience.

**FS:** And the last part, which is really important, and I personally also try to just follow that, is self-care. And providing resources for self-care is really important. This reminds me of Canadian psychologist Gabor Maté, if I pronounce his name correctly, he's a Canadian psychologist and a Holocaust survivor, but he has a very good definition of trauma. He says, and I like to quote him, he says, "Trauma is not what happens to you. It's what happens inside you as a result of what happened to you." So this emphasizes that while the external events can trigger trauma, it's not in the past. It can be still with the client or with the staff who has the lived experience. And it can impact the minds of... our minds and our body. So it's very important, especially to have this understanding and a clear definition of that, especially when we want to think about self-care activities. That was really important and that, I guess, because of this, organizations need to make sure that counseling services, if they want to opt for, are available and encourage them to use and any other kind of self-care activities that they prefer.

**FS:** We also need to acknowledge the fact that there's a research gap and lack of information regarding the mental health consequences of refugee resettlement work. And some few studies that exist, they found, for example, that it doesn't make a big difference if we just change the workload, let's say, or how many cases they have, because in terms of how negative impacts they might have. Because in a state, the way each of the worker can personally deal with this stress can be different. So having a training like stress management strategies, that's very important. Training on emotional intelligence, training on affect regulations, these kind of trainings are really important because knowingly or unknowingly, we might have internalized many issues which actually exist outside of us. Or some workers might identify someone else's problem with their own problem. So having all these kind of concepts and understandings in a clear, simple way, I guess, is very important for self-care. That was about some of the, of course, practices that we are advocating for, but of course, I'm sure you all have your own best practices.

## **A Policy Perspective**

**FS:** And now, I'd like to have a brief discussion with my colleague, Ali. So, Ali Tarokh, I hope you are doing well, and thank you for giving us this time. Can you briefly describe your background and current role in policy work?

**Ali Tarokh:** Yeah. Thank you, Farhad and Switchboard. Thank you so much for having me today. I'm very excited. I am Ali Tarokh, and I arrived here 12 years ago as a refugee, and I still believe I'm a refugee, while I have my citizenship. But I personally have some challenges with that term "former refugees" because in our reality, in my everyday life, former refugee doesn't exist. Still, after 12 years, I'm still facing some challenges as a person with lived experience in Chicago, in this country. And since I believe education is our only solution, I try to finish my, continue my education as much as I can. And while I was banned from studying in my country, when I arrived here, it was my first goal to pursue my education. I received my master's degree in political science. Now I'm a doctoral candidate in law and policy. And my dissertation focuses on refugee employment barriers in Illinois. And hopefully I can defend my dissertation this August. And also, I am a director of policy and advocacy at a nonprofit, Trellus, in Chicago, which we have been providing services to refugees and immigrant families for 46 years in Chicago.



**FS:** That's wonderful. Thank you for that introduction. So I have some specific questions:

How can agencies and agency staff, of course, those with or mostly those without lived experience, advocate for a work environment that hires, educates, trains, so that they can meet the needs of their staff with lived experience?

**AT:** So, this is a very good question. Also, the title of this webinar is very, very accurate because I think my colleague Chelsea mentioned some of her colleagues or workers are not working for the nonprofits or the resettlement agency for 15 years, 10 years, 20 years. So this is very important to realize that, how can we bring these lived experiences on the table? How can my colleagues go with lived experience, can climb the ladder, become part of the leadership, become part of decision-making process in the agency, not only the worker.

**AT:** So based on some studies and also my personal experience, majority of my fellows with lived experience get job or hired at the nonprofit agencies or resettlement agencies because of the language skills, not because of their educational skills or their work histories. So at the agency level, why I understand recruitment is not easy. But recently I'm, I become very interested in terms of role, role of HR departments in the nonprofit organizations, mainly in the resettlement agency because beyond that hiring, firing, the paperwork process, I believe the HR department can play prominent roles in terms of providing training, education, mandatory training to all the staff at different levels, from the leadership level to the inter-level positions.

**AT:** And also I believe the HR departments can help the entire agencies to move from transactional leadership style to the transformational, which is very important. And also I firmly believe that the leadership of those agencies must practice cross-cultural leadership. I want to read some numbers. It's very, it would be very interesting for our audience that there is a recent, two years ago, the University of San Francisco conducted a survey of 2,820 nonprofits. And that showed the leaders, nonprofits leaders. And that survey shows that many of the board of directors are disconnected from the communities they serve.

**AT:** And approximately half of nonprofit chief executives believe that their board members lack the right of establishing trust within the community. So in other words, the board members are unfamiliar with the mission and value and also the community they serve. But there is a gap, there is a disconnect. So nonprofits, the research management and also HR makes, they have to make sure they fill that gap and bring people, and write people to the board. So this is very, very important.

**AT:** And according to the Urban Institute, there is a report that 79% of board chairs and executive directors are non-Latinx white. 69% are white. And in contrast with the general population, which is only 60% of the population are non-Latinx white. And overall nonprofit workers is 60% non-Latinx white in 2020. That report was in 2020. So it tells me there is always a potential threat in nonprofit agencies, especially in reception agencies, that at the, especially at the leadership level, like a C-level level or directors level. So there is two different groups which are really threatened with nonprofits or reception agencies.

**AT:** First, one group starts with passion. They are very passionate for the mission and value, but they are not competent. Okay, lack of competency. The second group of staff, it's which is part of my lived experience as well, so they are competent, they know the job very well, but they are not passionate. So they are not passionate, so that the second group of that staff, they are actually threat to people with no lived experience and also trauma, because they can trigger the trauma. So a lack of understanding of their colleagues and workers and co-workers.



**FS:** Yeah, of course, those structural barriers are also there and there's a need for research, such kind of research. Thank you for that insight. So, my next question is,

Can you provide examples of different types of advocacy or ways to advocate at the individual agency or national level?

**AT:** So, as you mentioned that these three levels of advocacy are very important, they are connected and there is a strong relationship between all these three different levels. Individual level, okay, I believe all of us have to, especially us with lived experience, have to speak up. Storytelling, I firmly believe in storytelling to raise awareness, and write op-eds, reach out to your local papers, newspapers, share your stories. It's very important, helps people to understand. Education, education is very important, key, informing friends, family, community members about refugees, immigrant issues, our appreciation to our new city communities, and to build more informed and supportive communities.

**AT:** The agency level, especially for local agencies, I believe partnership and collaboration with other organizations, schools, businesses, government agencies to create, again, another network of support and resources for the immigrant and refugees, and also awareness campaigning. So means, I know for nonprofits fundraising is a key, turn that gala or fundraising as an awareness campaign. It means give a stage to your colleagues, to your community you serve, give them a chance to speak, give them a chance to talk about their lived experience, not only the success story, to let them talk about their challenges. [This] helps, again, to raise awareness and bring good changes.

**AT:** And also, again, the role of HR constantly try to keep the staff updated at all levels from the board of directors to line staff and develop, update their policies, and especially internal policies. And the national level, again, engaging with the lawmakers, policymakers. You should reach out to your senators or Congress people. And also participating in research and reporting. There is so many parts with supporting universities, social work departments, and also, again, coalition building is a key for the nonprofits.

**FS:** Yeah, thank you so much for all this great insight. I had another question, but I guess Caroline just let me know that we can put those resources at the resource part of this webinar. With that, I just let my colleague to continue.

**CD:** Yeah, I've included just in the chat to everyone some of the resources that we were asking Ali to provide for us, which includes this book, Policy Paradox, the Art of Political Decision Making, and then a couple of websites like the Refugee Advocacy Lab and MIRA Coalition that people can reach out to to learn a little more about advocacy, but I want to thank Ali and thank you, Farhad, for going through that. That was really insightful, and I think we just want to have a little bit of time to spend, maybe about 10 minutes or a little bit less than that, to just cover some of those Q&A questions that you all had.

## Learning from the Experts

**CD:** So I think one of them that I really enjoyed here, and we can take off the slides, yeah, that I want to hear from everyone is,

Are there any culturally tailored resources for how to work with clients for caseworkers with lived experience?



**CD:** An example, it is hard to expect that a caseworker with a different culture would follow Western principles in case management, especially if they're working with clients from similar cultures, so would love to hear from anyone on this panel if you'd like to jump in whenever.

**CL:** I'll share a little bit about some of the resources that we utilize during our training programs. We do discuss with staff and train staff on motivational interviewing. We do use a little bit more of a Western mindset when discussing case management. A big focus of the work that we do is client-centered, so meeting the client where they are at, and I think that inherently, and Caroline and Farhad would know more because they're enmeshed in social work schools, but meeting the client where they are at inherently gives the opportunity for that cultural understanding and deeper dive into those cultural nuances. My perspective.

**CD:** Thank you, Chelsea. Does anyone else have any thoughts on that question? Well, it sounds like we've had quite a few that are kind of related to direct service, and I know Chelsea was able to answer a couple, but we wanted to maybe expand on some of that too. So, one of those questions involved,

How do we encourage people to take breaks? And how... their pace has downstream effects on others who then have steps in the process, but literally fewer hours to do it because they're keeping their hours to 40. So, how do we encourage breaks? But another thing is also how do we give staff relief when we can't afford to reduce a caseload by hiring more staff?

**CD:** So, couple of different ones there.

**FS:** For the first question, how to encourage them to take breaks, I guess a reminder always, I guess, is a good practice that whatever they're doing is great work, but unless they take care of themselves, we cannot help another person. So, that is also, I feel it's a responsibility. If even you want to, we might feel responsible to just work and work as much as we can so that we can contribute more, but helping ourselves to help others is also important, and that is a good reminder.

**AT:** About the caseloads, I can say because I was a case manager as well for refugees, and this is, unfortunately, this is our reality, nonprofits and resettlement agencies are under-resourced. So, and also short of staff, this is our reality, and that's why anybody, I believe anybody who works for a resettlement agency, it's not only for their salary, also its mission, part of their art and commitment to the community. However, I believe the leadership of the agency can show the support, empathy, and any time when they feel, okay, there is kind of a low season, again, try to support the staff to take more break. Or sometimes there may be an unwritten agreement with the, without taking their PTO because they work more than 40 hours, okay, now they can take a couple hours out, they can go home earlier, something like that, but, unfortunately, reducing the caseload requires more advocacy at the top level, fighting at the national level to secure our funding.

**AT:** So, this is the problem and we know, unfortunately, two days ago, the Biden administration issued a new executive order to close the borders, and, honestly, I don't know what's going to happen if someone, a new president gets into the White House who is pursuing the anti-immigration policy.

**CD:** Thank you all for sharing. Another great question here that I want to bring up that actually goes with another question in our chat here is,



How would you recommend tackling those power dynamic issues? Our lived experience staff often do not think their voices are important or wanted, even when we coax them to share. And that kind of goes hand in hand with the other question about how do we encourage staff to speak up?

**CD:** So, I would love to hear from all your individual experiences on this.

**AT:** The question is how we can encourage the staff to speak up with staff with lived experience?

**CD:** That's right, yeah, it's about the power dynamic issues and how can we still have our staff speak up?

**AT:** So, probably Zorah can help me and Farhad more. I can, it's very challenging. I fought for my position, I reached this level. Still after 12 years living in this country, anytime when I want to advocate for myself or speak up, I really get heartbeat and it's really daunting. So, for different reasons, I think one of the reasons I'm coming from that culture that everything's transactional and my boss is everything. Now, practicing my rights in terms of going towards the transformational side, it's very, very challenging and it's not easy. So at the individual level, we need to practice more and more and make sure there is no consequences.

**AT:** Again, the role of HR, if the HR shows a strong support to the staff, especially with lived experience, and make them sure if you speak up, if you just talk about your rights, there is no consequences. This is very important, the backup support from HR, even if you are wrong, you have a different opinion, that's fine. So, again, so practice, practice, don't worry, and I ask the HR people, please show your support to your staff. But it's very scary, I can tell you, it's very scary to talk.

**FS:** So, yeah, give my opinion, I guess, to be frank, there's a lot of trust issues among many refugee communities. There is job insecurity issues also, and there's power dynamics, there's racism, there's fear. And so, it's not, of course, we can analyze it from different points of view. There are, I don't know, inferiority complex or, from one side, I guess, if from organizational level, a safe space is provided and encouraged for everyone to just talk. I guess that is one. And from the staff level, I guess, I believe that there is an agency still in everyone, and there's a will, and I totally agree with you to just try to tell your story, and try to just encourage them, just set them in their own level. Maybe learn from the top leadership, learn some of the languages, some of the terminology of the clients that you're working with, and that connection, that language, I guess, there's a lot of rich... each culture has a rich, there's a richness in that, and language carry a lot of that richness.

**FS:** And if they speak a few words, while they want to encourage that, not in a very serious meeting, but different kinds of spaces, I guess that will be encouraging. That's my take for now. I don't know if that makes sense.

**CD:** Thank you so much. Thank you, everyone. I wish we had more time to continue our Q&A, but I think that's all the time that we have today. We want to respect our attendees' time here, but you guys did such a wonderful job. Thank you for all your contributions to this work and your willingness to share your experiences.





## Conclusion

### Reviewing Learning Objectives

**CD:** So, I want to just wrap up to remind everyone of our learning objectives: to explain the importance of having diverse and representative staff, to identify the unique challenges experienced by resettlement workers, to apply key organizational and individual strategies to support resettlement, and to plan and advocate for more equitable systemic policies and organizational practices.

### Feedback Survey

**CD:** So, we appreciate it if you could please fill out the survey for this webinar to just provide us your feedback today. You can scan that QR code or click the link in the chat. There should be one, I think, coming in. And we just hope to hear from you for a little bit, so that we can improve our future training and technical assistance.

### Recommended Resources

**CD:** And the slides will be available today, so if you would like to take a look at any of these recommended resources that we drew a lot of our research from, as well as the ones from our panelists, you can access those. You can keep going.

### Stay Connected

**CD:** And we hope you just stay connected with Switchboard in the future. And thank you again for engaging with us today. I hope everyone has a great rest of their day.

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