

A photograph of a person sitting at a dark green table. The person's hands are visible, one holding a white napkin. In front of them is a white plate with a colorful floral pattern and a meal consisting of rice, yellow vegetables, and a piece of pink watermelon. To the left of the plate are a silver fork and knife. The background is a dark green wall.

# Integration in a New England Town

*A Case Study of Refugees in Towns  
Augusta, Maine, USA*

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# About the RIT Project

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The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

## Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

## Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

## For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

[www.refugeesintowns.org](http://www.refugeesintowns.org)



# Location



# Introduction

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This study provides a composite view of reflections by refugees, host community residents, and municipal level administrators in Augusta, Maine on their experiences with the integration process. The opening section contains excerpts from individuals, reproduced in some detail to convey the richness and diversity of views. Our research highlights dynamics between refugees and the host community with education, employment, healthcare, emergency services, recreation, community service, and public spaces. Through this research, our aim was to understand the process of refugee integration within Augusta.

We sought to explore three main questions in Augusta:

- How does the local host community view the recent influx of refugees to the Augusta area?
- How are Augusta-based refugees adapting to living in Augusta, in terms of finding housing and jobs, accessing services, and interacting with the community?

- How are Augusta service providers adapting to changing needs in the community generally, and the refugee population specifically?

Our research team primarily conducted qualitative interviews to collect data, supplemented with quantitative data and grey literature on Augusta and the U.S. refugee context. Before beginning interviews, our team created a demographics projection that allowed adaptive, statistically non-representative stratified sampling of the Augusta population. In total, we interviewed 66 people. We aimed to interview 50% women and 50% men, and the final gender breakdown was 29 women and 37 men – with 55% men and 45% women.

For our key informants, we had divided the numbers of projected interviews based on public sectors. We worked with organizations and nonprofits that engaged with the refugee community to draw on their existing connections. After identifying a few refugee families, we used

## About the Authors and How They Wrote the Report

The RIT project recognizes that the legal category of “refugee” does not adequately capture the full range of forcibly displaced persons, or journeys of mobility beyond the period of qualification for “refugee” status (Atfield, Brahmhatt and O’Toole, 2007; Goldenziel, 2016; Schibel *et al.*, 2002). This report looks at resettled refugees and secondary refugees, defined here as individuals who were resettled elsewhere in the United States by a volunteer agency, received their three-month federal stipend, and following that period chose to move to the Augusta area. We also note that the history of integration in Augusta is colored by experiences of displaced French-Canadians and Irish who migrated before the legal category of “refugee” was established.

The term “host community” is also contested (Phillips, 2003; Scottish Refugee Council, 2009). As a working definition for this report, we use the locally-derived terms, “Old Mainer” and “New Mainer” to distinguish between two groups in the Augusta host community. “Old Mainer” is used by locals to refer to the population that was born, raised, and is currently living in Maine, and usually has been for generations. Most of the Old Mainer population is characterized as over 60, English speaking, and white. “New Mainer” refers to non-white immigrants who have moved to Maine recently, and is particularly used in the context of refugee settlement. Many of the white, English speaking newcomers jokingly refer to themselves as New Mainers because the underlying understanding is that the term is reserved for non-white refugees. In this report, we use the terms “New Mainer” and “Old Mainer” only when the interviewee used that terminology.

snowball sampling to reach a wider, and more diverse group of respondents. Refugee families consisted of those recently settled within the last two years in the Augusta area, but also with refugees that had been in the area for over three years. In these two broad ranges, there were families that had arrived in the few months prior to our research. The municipal government of Augusta was a resource in helping identify and recruit key stakeholders and host community

interviewees. We conducted two focus groups with the goal of fostering ease and sharing ideas. One focus group was with service providers and the other was with host community members. However, most of our interviews were conducted with individuals either at their homes, in open public spaces, or for key informants at their place of work. When conducting interviews, we asked for permission to record for transcription purposes.

### Qualitative Sampling Chart

N value	Category
<b>N= 39</b> Sex (Male= 23, Female=16)	<b>Key Informants</b>
2	Religious Organization Leaders, Augusta
8	Educators and Administrators, Augusta
4	State and City Government Employees, Augusta
10	Non-profit Sector, Augusta
2	Health Sector
2	Development Sector
11	First Respondents (Focus Group = 10)
<b>N= 19</b> Sex (Male=10, Female=19)	<b>Refugees</b>
11	Iraqi
2	Afghan
6	Syrian
<b>N= 8</b> Sex (Male=4, Female=4)	<b>Host Community</b>
1	Host community members
7	Focus group with Local French-Canadian Club

# Background on Refugees in the United States

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The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees, and though recently resettlement numbers have declined, the United States remains one of the top resettlement countries in the world. Over 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1975 (Refugee Council USA, 2017). Resettlement of refugees is conducted through the United States Refugee Admission Program. The program is comprised of several federal agencies including the State Department, Homeland Security, Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of State). The President of the United States each year determines the number of refugees who may be admitted, along with the designated nationalities and processing priorities (Refugee Council USA, 2017).

The U.S. history with refugee settlement begins with the end of World War II when the United States resettled nearly half a million Europeans through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. Resettlement of refugees continued through the Cold War period with the U.S. focusing its resettlement initiatives on taking in refugees from Communist states. Following the large resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1960s and 1970s, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which incorporated the United Nations definition of a refugee as defined by the 1951 Convention. Through the Refugee Act, the U.S. standardized the resettlement services for refugees by creating the U.S. Refugee Admission Program.

Since the 1980s, refugee resettlement demographics in the U.S. have become more diverse and less defined by Cold War dynamics, with refugees coming mostly from Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Burma, Iraq, Somalia, and Bhutan (Igielnik, 2017). The largest shift in resettlement patterns occurred post September 11,

2001: under the Bush and Obama administrations, refugee resettlement numbers decreased, with the lowest numbers reaching 27,110 in 2002. Numbers under the second term of the Obama administration began to increase, only to shrink again under the Trump administration with a projection of 45,000 refugees to resettle in 2018 (Rose, 2017).

In addition to formally resettled refugees, historically there have been large numbers of irregular migrants to American cities. Efforts to manage irregular migrants has affected their precariousness to varying degrees. For example, since the 1990s, efforts like the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program have attempted to provide “provisional” humanitarian relief to displaced persons, meant to protect them from deportation and offer the right to work until the “triggering event” of their displacement has been recovered from (Messick and Bergeron, 2014). By contrast, recent “immigrant bans,” bolstering of Federal immigration enforcement, and efforts to remove TPS protections under the Trump Administration have put strains on both legal migrants from singled-out countries—especially Muslim majority countries—and irregular migrants alike.

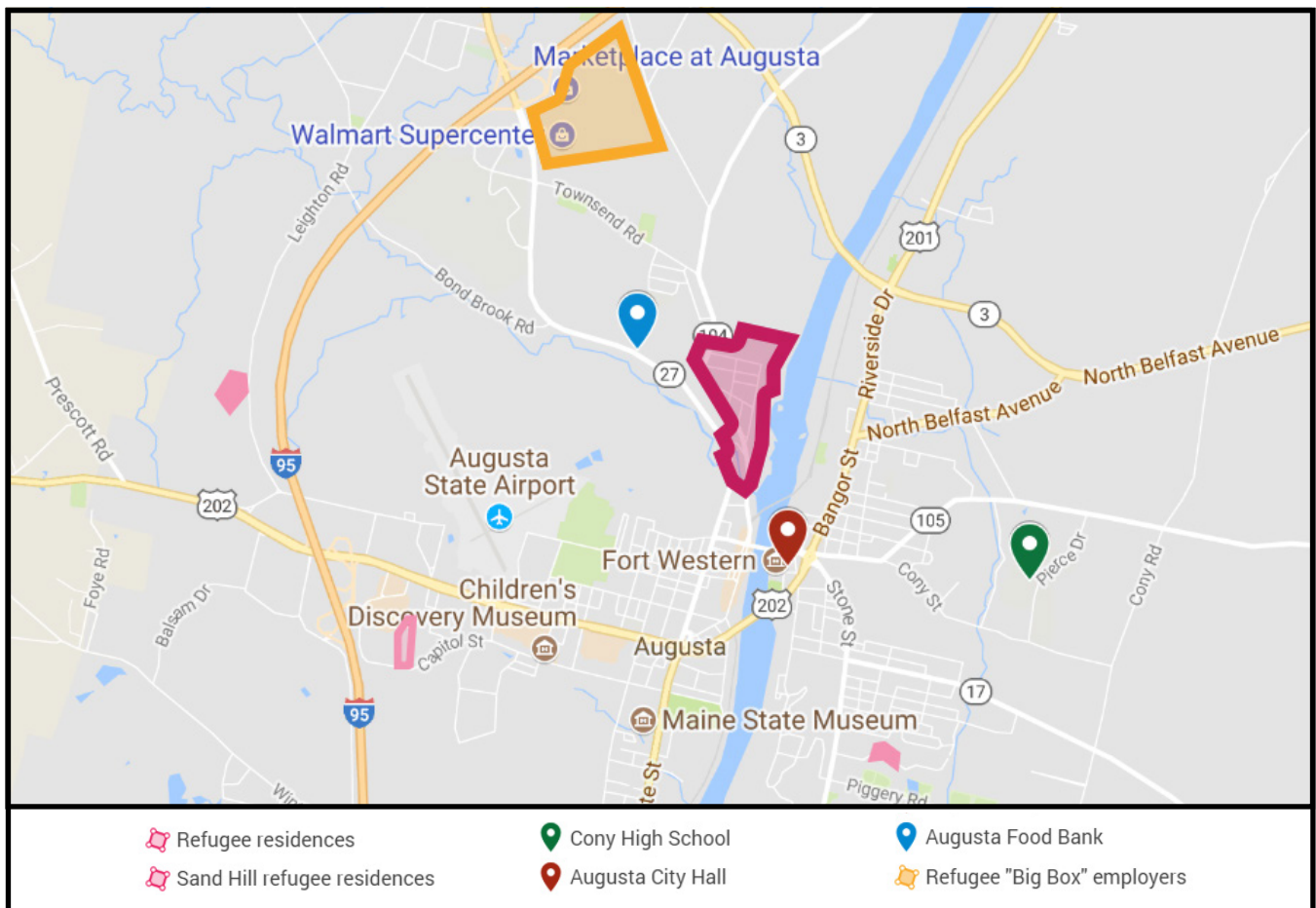
# Background on Refugees in Augusta

Augusta, the capital of Maine, has a population of nearly 20,000 residents. As the capital, state government is the principle employer, resulting in many commuters and increasing the population from 20,000 to 40,000 on a daily basis (Muskie *et al.*, 2018). Demographically, Augusta follows the state trends with an aging and predominantly white population. However, immigration to Augusta is not a new trend. Large waves of immigration can be traced back to French-Canadians and Irish post-civil war. During the 20th century another wave of French-Canadians immigrated to Augusta with the boom of the paper mill and textile industries (Maine Historical Society). Most recently in 2013, Augusta has received a relatively large

population of Iraqi and Afghan refugees, most of which are secondary refugees. Catholic Charities Maine, the resettlement agency, has resettled 50 refugees in 2016 to Augusta (Catholic Charities, 2017). Though there are no exact figures on this new refugee population, we estimate a range of 350-500 people.

## Mapping the Refugee Population

The refugee population in Augusta in 2017 consisted of 45 Iraqi families, 3 Syrian families, and 3 Afghan families. The process of chain migration





began in 2013, when two Iraqi families moved to Augusta from Portland, Maine, and were later joined by other Iraqi refugees. Most refugees are clustered in apartment style housing in Sand Hill, a low-income neighborhood near the waterfront, where housing is more available and affordable compared with other neighborhoods. The apartment complexes in this area are controlled by “slum lords,” as they are referred to by refugees,

housing stakeholders, and host community members alike. These landlords are known for not maintaining the facilities, and not being responsive to their tenants. Only a minority of families moved to new apartments that are in better condition than their previous apartments in Sand Hill. We did not meet any refugees who have purchased homes in the Augusta area.

# The Urban Impact

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## Housing Market

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The majority of refugees come to Augusta following their primary resettlement period, so they are not assisted in finding housing by the main Volunteer Agency, Catholic Charities, leading to gaps in information about refugees’ living situations. Much of the housing in the area is dilapidated, further complicating the settlement process. The city itself faces a housing shortage generally, but with the arrival of more refugee populations, this problem will become exacerbated. Concerns on the part of the Housing Authority and the city municipality about housing shortages for large family units are beginning to surface, but talks between these two stakeholders about filling the housing shortage remains at the preliminary stage, with no concrete plans yet in place. We have heard two views about landlords in Augusta: some voice frustration in working with the “slum lords” of the low-income Sand Hill neighborhood to find refugees housing, while others in the Housing Authority are grateful for the cooperation of these landlords.

Some refugees lacked knowledge about their tenant rights. This was demonstrated by refugees’ experience with bed bug infestations. An Iraqi woman had her home treated three times, yet the bedbugs remained. The woman did not know about bedbugs, nor her rights as a tenant. She

expressed feeling disturbed at how the landlord handled the situation: “When we moved to this home, I threw away everything. Our clothes, furniture, everything. We had to start over again.”

The Augusta Housing Authority provides services in the Augusta region primarily through the Section 8 voucher program, a tenant-based housing subsidy that travels with a given tenant and can be used in the private rental market. Currently, the Augusta Housing Authority’s client portfolio consists of about 600 families within a ten-mile radius of Augusta. Several refugee families we interviewed were receiving Section 8 vouchers to pay for rent.

The Augusta Housing Authority expressed adaptation as their current strategy: “We’ve identified new developments as a strategic priority along with doing other work around helping private landlords rehabilitate existing housing. A lot of the housing stock here is really old; there are a lot of units that are at risk due to safety code issues that our code enforcer has identified, and our replenishment just hasn’t kept pace with the need.” Five hundred units were or are at the risk of being lost since 2013 due to fires or serious code issues. The Housing Authority notes that it is constrained in what it can achieve with the current level of funding. The Housing Authority was explicit in stating that it has not seen its waiting list numbers increase and does not view the movement of refugees to Augusta as a drain

on resources. From their perspectives, refugees are seen as enriching the community and a “huge positive.”

## State and Federal Social Services

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“There’s a mentality of scarcity in Maine.”  
- Erik Karas, Faith Community Leader and Service Provider

“We need to remain vigilant in our efforts to guard against fraud and abuse in these programs. One dollar fraudulently acquired or used is a dollar not being used to provide food for a needy child. We cannot turn a blind eye to the fraud and abuse being perpetrated by welfare recipients and retailers.”

- Mary Mayhew, former Commissioner of Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services

Maine’s state-administered federal programs include MaineCare (formerly Medicaid), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps), as well as the municipally administered state program, General Assistance (for more details on these programs, see Social Security Administration, n.d. and Catholic Charities, n.d.). The programs most commonly used by refugees are TANF, SSI, and SNAP. According to Mary Mayhew, former Commissioner of Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services, in 2011 one in three of all of Maine residents was receiving welfare benefits (Meyer, 2017).

Many in Maine and in Augusta believe the welfare system is subject to fraud, and the Republican

administration of Governor Paul LePage has made welfare reform the focal point of his gubernatorial agenda. State Senator Eric Brackey has sought to instate a six-month residency restriction for welfare applicants, in an apparent attempt to discourage low-income families from moving to Maine. The length of time a family can remain on TANF support was recently reduced from five years to three.

In our interviews with service providers in the community, we heard these views applied to the refugee population. They said refugees are overly reliant on, and abusive of, the welfare system and that they “compound the problem of welfare.” One service provider acknowledged his bias and confessed that he “looks at [the refugee population] as guilty until proven innocent” of welfare fraud. Mainers pride themselves on their hardscrabble attitude towards life and work, stemming from Maine’s harsh winters, remote location, and historically backwater position in the U.S., all of which make Maine a hard place to make a living. Many Augusta residents expressed some aspects of this collective identity. Paradoxically, this view contrasts with data provided by the city of Augusta’s Development Services office, which show Mainers’ overwhelming reliance on welfare, both among new arrivals and long-time residents. This contradiction may reinforce Mainers’ resentment in refugees: failure to live-up to societal pressure to be self-reliant fosters anxiety in welfare recipients and stokes frustration and anger toward outsiders. As one resident said: “We just can’t hand it to you for free, we gotta have to earn everything that we get.”

“That’s what separates us. I don’t care if your country is that bad. My country doesn’t need to pay for that. If you want to be an American, get a job and support your family. [Welfare] shouldn’t be an option. I have a hard time with that. It makes me profile them.”

- Augusta Service Provider

**“We see people who use and abuse social services... preying on people’s good will.”**  
*- Augusta Service Provider*

A refugee attempting to access social services must first have a consultation with Augusta’s General Assistance (GA) office and is then written a voucher for foods and other basic needs (such as diapers and toiletries). The GA office prints vouchers on special security paper, assigns them to a specific vendor (usually Hannaford grocery store), and includes on the voucher the item and quantity that can be purchased. The vendor uses the voucher as proof of purchase and bills the municipality.

The GA requires a high level of accountability from clients, including proof that they are actively job hunting, applying for Social Security, and attending physical therapy appointments, if applicable. Recipients must fill out forms and check in with the City’s career center on a weekly basis. The GA conducts random checks to verify recipients are fulfilling their responsibilities. The City bears responsibility for all administrative costs, and assistance payments are reimbursed up to 70% by the state. Data collected by the General Assistance office indicate that five newly arrived families in Augusta received GA support in the month of July 2017, and in all of fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017) 23 newly arrived families received GA vouchers. Refugees in Augusta typically learn

**“The wonderful thing about the help we are able to render is [that New Mainers] do not stay on the system long. We are learning that the New Mainers may need an initial shot in the arm to help them get going, but then fairly quickly they are coming off of our general assistance roll, and either they are working or finding other resources that are available to them so that they no longer need our assistance.”**  
*- City of Augusta Employee*

about and access these welfare programs through caseworkers, their Capital Area New Mainers Project (CANMP) family mentor teams, and Catholic Charities.

If ineligible for TANF, refugees and certain non-refugee legal immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan, and their families, may be eligible to receive cash assistance from the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) including the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program, available to individuals and families within the first eight months of their arrival in the United States. ORR provides monthly cash transfers of \$230 for an individual, \$611 for a family of four, or other variable amounts depending on family size. RCA transfers are only available to individuals and families that do not qualify for TANF: in no circumstance will a family receive both RCA and TANF simultaneously. In Augusta we encountered few current recipients of RCA. This is because most refugees in Augusta are secondary refugees, having moved to the city from other places, and have already passed their eight-month window.

Many of the refugees we interviewed expressed concern and stress surrounding their general assistance benefits. “When DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] sends one paper, my mother gets worried, did the TANF get cut? Did the food stamps get cut?” This is a scene that plays out frequently in refugees’ homes. We perceived hesitancy on the part of refugees to seek improvements in their benefits for fear that their current support could be withdrawn. In some cases, this hesitancy impacted their ability to access available welfare services. This stress could be relieved, and refugees could access benefits, if they fully understood what the requirements, time limits, and thresholds are that affect their levels of welfare support from different programs.

## Community Services

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“We can easily see that the New Mainers will get on their feet, and will not be accessing services anymore. Our hope is that they will become partners with us in providing services to whoever becomes the new group in need”.

- *Faith Community Member and Service Provider*

Saint Mark’s Episcopal Church in Augusta organizes three community services that are used by refugees: a food bank, a clothing bank called Attie’s Attic, and Everyday Basics, a toiletries pantry. Refugees make up 60% of the 358 people who use these services. Saint Mark’s services predate the arrival of refugees, and the volunteers note that there was a large increase in use over the past year, with the number of recipients rising from under 150 people to 358.

Volunteers at Saint Mark’s are well organized and are often first in line to collect groceries from the food bank. There have been no major conflicts between refugees and host community members at the food bank, however volunteers note that with the increased volume there are grumblings in the line about refugees taking the fresh produce before others can get there. This again illustrates the mentality of scarcity that is pervasive in Augusta’s Old Mainer community.

## Education

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“Our school district has been very welcoming, and the city council and school board have been very receptive to adding Ed Techs and teachers to accommodate new students.”

- *James Anastasio, Augusta Schools Superintendent*

“We have some very highly trained instructors, and we try to stay abreast of what we’re seeing in our classrooms. Like anything, we don’t know what to expect.”

- *Zane Clement, Director of Adult Education*

The Augusta education system—made up of five public schools—is an essential component of the integration experience, both for providing English language classes, and for promoting relationships between the host community and refugees. Our research participants all had some experience with Augusta schools or Adult Education, either as students, teachers, coaches, parents of students, or administrators.

There is also an Adult Education program and a Capital Area Technical Center. In the 2009-2010 school year, there were 17,898 students enrolled in school between pre-kindergarten (pre-k) and 12th grade in Kennebec County: 140-150 students were enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) federally-funded specialized programs from pre-k to 12th grade, and 80 students were enrolled in English Language Learners (ELL) programs. Both school Superintendent James Anastasio and Director of Adult Education Zane Clement believe that the number of students enrolling in ESL and ELL classes will increase this year.

Administrators of Augusta schools are pleased with the gains that they have made in meeting the needs of ELL students. The school department has hired an interpreter, as well as four Ed Techs and three additional teachers who started in August 2017. Ed Techs assist teachers in providing specialized attention to specific students who need additional help learning English. Farrington School, the only elementary school with an ELL program, overhauled the program in January and hired additional Ed Techs in an effort to do more concentrated, one-on-one work with ELL students.

Two administrators expressed a common frustration: the need for accurate information about the number and timing of refugee student arrivals. The former principal of Cony High School told



how four years ago, he heard at a conference that there would be 300 to 400 new refugee student arrivals who would require English language instruction. When the arrivals did not occur all at once but were rather distributed over an extended period of time, it was frustrating to have been briefed inaccurately. The slower arrival pace has ultimately made it easier for the school system to adjust, but inaccurate projections of increased needs created problems for planning.

Currently, the Superintendent's Office is trying to make it easier for families to register their children with the school department. Some families may not know that they need to register or how to register, so providing this guidance to refugee families is critical. Superintendent Anastasio

is exploring ways to keep Cony High School open for registration throughout the summer to accommodate families that move to Augusta in the late summer months.

Teachers at Cony High School expressed three common themes: 1) refugees do not take their education for granted, 2) refugees are fun to have in class, and 3) refugees and their parents appreciate their teachers. One teacher felt that while a refugee student may take up more of their time, they are "learning ten times more" than other students in the classroom. A kindergarten teacher expressed that having students who are learning English in her classroom has created a "teamwork atmosphere" in the class.

# The Refugees' Experiences

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## Livelihoods and income

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Roughly half of the refugees we interviewed are unemployed, making ends meet with different types of social welfare. The other half are working in business, services, education, and health. In the past two years, two Iraqi families opened small convenience stores selling Mediterranean and other goods. "My son wanted to open this store to give a place for the older people like me to sit and get together," said the father of the first Iraqi store owner in Augusta. The Iraqi store, located near Sand Hill, functions as a gathering space primarily for Iraqi males, and at times Syrian men. During the summer, we often saw groups sitting outside the store conversing. While host community members did not gather in front of the store, many of them shopped there regularly.

We often heard from refugees that they could not secure jobs in Augusta in the same sector as they had worked in their country of origin. "My husband worked in the chocolate business and he can't find

anything in this industry and I can't work because of my health issues," said an Iraqi woman in her mid-30s. Several families shared personal stories about their health issues as the main reason for the inability to participate in the workforce.

Many of the refugees we interviewed expressed aspirations to open businesses and continue their education yet identified several barriers of entry. Lack of English was a barrier to both opening a business and continuing education. The bureaucracy and the unfamiliar system associated with small business ownership was another barrier. "I want to open an Iraqi restaurant. I love cooking and want to represent my community well. But there is so much paperwork and regulations. To open the restaurant, I have to have a stove vent that costs something like \$10,000!" said an Iraqi man.

## The Meaning of Integration

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“Integration means not being seen as an outsider, and also means being able to be part of community without having to lose important parts of my identity, [*i.e.*] being Arab and Muslim.”

- *Woman Iraqi Refugee*

During our research, we asked our interviewees to define integration. Generally, there were similar themes to their answers. Many said a strong grasp of the English was key for successful integration. Being able to engage with the community through the labor force is another key component of refugees’ integration definition.

Some refugees noted the inability to access transportation as a barrier. One Iraqi woman

identified her inability to drive, along with English, as the biggest barriers to integration. “If I had a driver’s license I could take the kids and myself and interact more with the local community. I would be forced to speak and figure my way out. When I’m out with my husband, he does most of the talking because he’s great in English, so I’m not put in the position of needing to learn.”

Iraqi refugees are divided in how they view the host community in Augusta—some find the host communities’ presence comforting, while others try not to associate with natives based on past negative experiences. Afghan refugees moved to Augusta primarily to be further away from other Afghans, noting societal pressures to conform that they wanted to escape. Many refugees, regardless of their origin, link their level of integration with CANMP family mentors’ involvement, noting that CANMP was fundamental to making their connection to the local community.

## Conclusion

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Our time in Augusta overwhelmed us with information, and we were able to leave with insights regarding social realities, resources needed to support integration, ideas for improving migrant-integration policies, and grounded theoretical models of integration.

In conversations with Augusta locals that work with the refugee population, we asked what resources they need to continue their work. After more funds, the most mentioned resource was additional translators in the Augusta area. Many said interactions between host and refugee communities are limited, especially for adults not enrolled in an education program, and there is a need for increased avenues for interaction between migrants and hosts.

Finally, we noted the undercurrents of racism in our discussions. Host community members are not aware of the degree to which their perceptions affect their interactions with the refugee population. For example, beyond simply being unaware about what a *hijab* is and what it represents, many host community members viewed the headscarf as something that needed to be removed, was backwards or oppressive, and some thought coaxing Muslim migrants could change their practice. This ideology extended to the perception of other facets of refugees’ culture. Some hosts’ impetus to help or engage with refugees was based on their perceived need to change their cultural expressions. However, these people specifically did not appear to believe that pressuring refugees to engage in cultural assimilation was a problem.

As we reflected on our observations in Augusta, we realized that the host community and refugee population shared a willingness to better understand one another. The major barriers to engaging and meeting each other stemmed from fear, not knowing how to make an introduction, and not having a public location for interaction. From this observation, we designed World to Table, a pop-up dinner series with the aim of breaking down barriers, reducing fears, and uniting the community through food.

With World to Table, we host dinner events open to the general public in which Augusta residents are able to sample traditional or ethnic foods cooked by other Augusta residents. To date, World to Table events have featured Iraqi, Syrian, Afghan, Lebanese, and French-Canadian cuisine. Approximately 70% of our guests at these events have been host community members. Our goal is to secure a location in downtown Augusta to serve as a consistent venue for meeting and sharing food, and to use this site as a pilot for other towns facing similar challenges integrating the community. Our research and our community building activities reinforce our understanding that integration is a lengthy, multigenerational process that can be supported, accelerated, and

sustained by uniting the community over shared experiences.

## The Future of Integration in Augusta

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When asked about the short and long-term future in regard to community and career, most refugees envisioned themselves living and raising their children in Augusta. Others hoped to buy homes and open businesses. Refugee parents hoped that their children would succeed in school and continue on with higher education. Several interviewees plan to stay in Augusta but would move to a different city or state if better opportunities present themselves.

A few secondary refugees disliked their environment in Augusta and wanted to move back to the states they relocated from. For example, one Iraqi woman with a family of six had made plans to move back to Manchester, New Hampshire after her daughters graduate high school because her friends, family, and her husband's family remain there.

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**Anna Ackerman** received a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School, where she focused on international negotiation and gender analysis in international studies. Anna's hometown, Augusta, is a prime location for a case study as it has recently become a destination for over 500 secondary refugees. To compliment the research that her team did over the summer, Anna has started a pop-up dinner series titled "World to Table," with the aim of breaking down barriers, reducing fears, and uniting the community through food. Previously, Anna worked as a gender consultant to the peace process in Myanmar with Athena Consortium and as Assistant to the Directors of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine. She received her B.A. in Gender and Women's Studies from Bowdoin College.

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

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