

Community Sponsorship: A Transformative Model for Refugee Resettlement and Integration in the U.S.

Lessons learned in community sponsorship
across U.S. resettlement agencies during the
Afghan Placement and Assistance Program (APA)

April 2023



**Refugee Welcome
Collective**



Description of CS Programming Under APA

IRIS, a 501(c)(3) affiliate, currently has 30 community groups. Between September 2017 and September 2022, these groups supported 250 clients.

Regarding the Role of Community Sponsorship

- Community sponsorship has become an increasingly important tool for IRIS to support refugees and asylum seekers.
- The quality of care and support of these sponsors is vital and often overlooked by practitioners. IRIS provides a framework for sponsors to ensure they are providing the best possible care for their sponsored individuals.
- In many cases, IRIS needs to provide additional support to sponsors, including financial assistance, to ensure they can provide the best possible care for their sponsored individuals.

Program Management

- IRIS has been the primary program manager for the community sponsorship program since its inception in 2017. IRIS provides ongoing support and guidance to sponsors throughout the sponsorship process.
- IRIS has established a robust system of communication and reporting to ensure that sponsors are providing the best possible care for their sponsored individuals. This includes regular check-ins, training, and support.
- IRIS provides a framework for sponsors to ensure they are providing the best possible care for their sponsored individuals. This includes regular check-ins, training, and support.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

Under APA, the sponsorship program was restructured to provide a more holistic and integrated approach to community sponsorship. This included the creation of a new role for Program Manager and Sponsorship Officer, the establishment of a new Sponsorship Officer position, and the creation of a new Sponsorship Officer position.

Sponsor Guidelines

- Sponsors are required to provide a safe and secure environment for their sponsored individuals. This includes providing a suitable living arrangement and ensuring that the sponsored individual has access to basic necessities.
- Sponsors are required to provide ongoing support and guidance to their sponsored individuals. This includes regular check-ins, training, and support.
- Sponsors are required to provide financial support to their sponsored individuals. This includes providing a monthly stipend to cover their basic living expenses.



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Executive Summary

On July 8, 2021, the U.S. announced its withdrawal from Afghanistan would be completed by August 31, 2021. On August 14, 2021, the Taliban entered Kabul, Afghanistan and declared victory. Immediately, one of the largest non-combatant evacuation processes in history began. Over an 18-day period, more than 124,000 people were evacuated.¹

In response, the U.S. government's Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) program welcomed more than 88,500 Afghan nationals² – mostly as humanitarian parolees – to the U.S. in just over a year starting in September of 2021. The Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) program was also created to ensure parolees had access to adequate support in their first months in the U.S. through the established resettlement system. The program's pace challenged the traditional resettlement system to think outside the box and ask how it could welcome such large numbers on such tight timelines. Community sponsorship (CS) emerged as an answer.

CS allows members of the public, private sector, and peripheral civil society to participate directly in the welcoming of newcomers by volunteering to advance integration for a sponsored individual or family. Most of these CS programs are facilitated or supported by one of the nine national resettlement agencies (RAs) and one of their over 250 local offices or affiliates.³ These agencies provide sponsors with the tools and information they need to help newcomers access housing, school enrollment, benefits, health care, employment-related services, and more. Through community sponsorship, APA was not only possible, but also highly effective and revealed pathways toward integration that were sustainable for over 72,839 people⁴ as of September 2022. All of this took place simultaneously as populations from other countries were resettled through separate programs.



In order for CS to expand rapidly and succeed under APA, several coordinating and funding organizations and projects emerged at the national level including [Welcome.US](#), [Community Sponsorship Hub](#), and [Refugee Welcome Collective](#) (RWC). On December 14 and 15, 2022, more than a year since the start of APA, RWC hosted a peer learning convening which brought together the community sponsorship staff across agencies to reflect on the past year – including its challenges, successes, and lessons learned – and to build community amongst the country's frontline experts in CS programming. This report is intended to record their reflections.

1 Kessler, G. (2021, September 2). *The Afghan evacuation and the war – by the numbers*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/02/afghan-evacuation-war-by-numbers>

2 Operation Allies Welcome Announces Departure of All Afghan Nationals from the National Conference Center Safe Haven in Leesburg, VA | Homeland Security. (2022, September 27). <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/09/27/operation-allies-welcome-announces-departure-all-afghan-nationals-national>

3 During the APA program period, there were nine RAs. Bethany Christian Services became the tenth national RA in FY 2023.

4 This figure is the sum of reported APA clients from nine resettlement agencies as of September 2022.

CS Experts' Summarized Reflections

Under APA, community sponsorship expanded and, in many cases, transformed from ad hoc to institutionalized at many local resettlement agencies. With funding through agencies like Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH) and the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), agencies worked diligently across the U.S. to “build the plane while flying it.” As a result, there are now terms in use to help the entire resettlement sector describe CS programs (e.g. **Support Teams**, where refugees receive *some* core services from the support team and the remainder from local agency case managers; **Co-sponsorship**, where refugees receive the *majority* of core services from co-sponsors and the remainder from local agency; and **Sponsor Circles**, where members of the public provide *all* core services without case management support from a local agency. Materials, protocols, policies, and systems across the country were developed or expanded upon helping agencies and sponsors better support newcomers. Some of these materials are office- and location-specific, some are resettlement agency-specific, and some are now sector-wide.



Looking forward, agencies recognize the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration with their peers at other organizations. In 2023, RWC intends to continue to convene sponsorship experts from across resettlement through its membership. Among other topics, agencies are interested in working together to standardize data collection learning, storytelling, and sponsor compliance; to investigate options for sustainable funding for CS; to further enhance training for sponsors in targeted ways; and to create systems, processes, and approaches for diversifying sponsors to better include people of all races, religions, ethnicities, cultures, gender identities, and sexual orientations, as well as to better include universities, corporations, and service clubs. Improvements in these areas will likely reveal new financial and community resources with which to better support newcomers through CS programs.

Background

About the Refugee Welcome Collective

The Refugee Welcome Collective (RWC) is a community sponsorship technical assistance project of Church World Service created in October 2021 by an award from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). The project's aim is to improve outcomes for refugees resettled through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) by developing and disseminating resources, facilitating learning and knowledge sharing opportunities, and hosting a collective of members consisting of local and national community sponsorship staff to build capacity and expand community sponsorship programs across the U.S.

RWC members are community sponsorship experts representing all national resettlement agencies who operate in all regions and at both local and national levels. RWC members help set priorities of the RWC and contribute knowledge and expertise to key RWC materials and resources.



About the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program

Following the fall of Afghanistan's elected government in August 2021, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began leading a federal government-wide initiative known as Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) to support eligible Afghans with their resettlement in the United States. This initiative consisted of several phases of expedited and specialized vetting and health screenings prior to entry, a framework for granting humanitarian parole (exceptional entry into the U.S. in the face of a compelling emergency and urgent humanitarian reason), the installation and operation of temporary housing and processing facilities and streamlined adjudication of immigrant status and work authorization for arriving Afghan evacuees.

OAW also paved the way for Afghans who were granted humanitarian parole to be eligible for the same benefits that refugees receive through the standard U.S. refugee resettlement Reception and Placement (R&P) program. The resulting process for placing Afghan humanitarian parolees in communities across the U.S. and connecting them to local resettlement agencies for the delivery of these benefits and services is known as the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program (APA).

APA began in September 2021 and is planned to run until March of 2023. It provides Afghan humanitarian parolees a per capita amount of \$2,275, including \$1,225 for direct assistance and \$1,050 for agency administrative costs. Support services provided by APA include the following, as needed: airport reception, safe and appropriate housing, adequate food supplies, seasonal clothing, pocket money for each adult, material needs support, assistance in accessing health service, assistance with enrollment in services appropriate to their personal circumstances as eligible, assistance with school-aged minor school enrollment, cultural orientation, and assistance with

accessing legal services to apply for adjustment of status. Between September 2021 and September 2022, nine resettlement agencies (RAs) report welcoming 72,839 Afghan humanitarian parolees under APA.

APA was rolled out at a time when RAs and their affiliates were already understaffed. Given the reduction of resettlement numbers during the previous administration, organizations had significantly shrunk. This context is an important backdrop for the importance of and challenges in implementing CS programs during APA.



Summary of Process and Methodologies

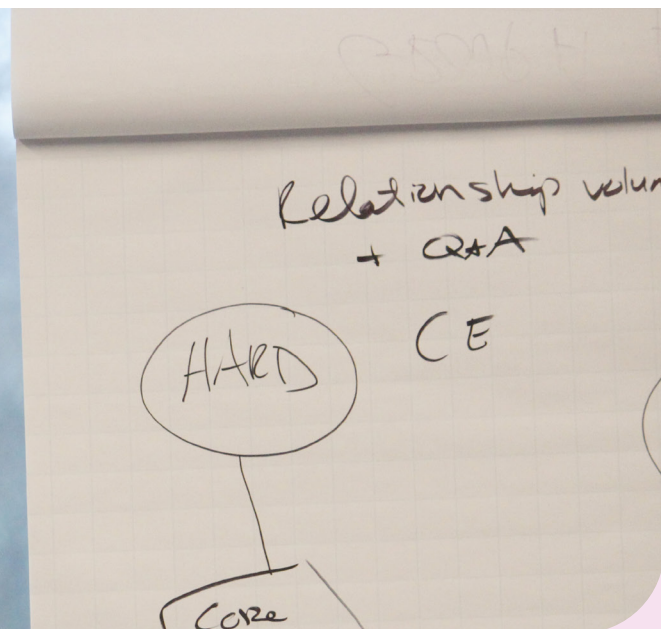
RWC hosted an in-person convening with its members on December 14 and 15, 2022 which brought together CS staff across eight RAs (HIAS, IRC, CWS, USCCB, USCRI, EMM, ECDC, and LIRS) and four local agencies⁵ (African Community Center of Denver, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services in Connecticut, Della Lamb in Kansas City Missouri, and Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri). The U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) also attended a two-hour session on the morning of December 15 to offer their experiences and insights. World Relief was unable to attend the in-person convening, but provided their insights during a follow-up interview and document review.

This convening had three main goals:

1. **To identify lessons learned in running community sponsorship programs during APA**
2. **To celebrate successes and impact for welcomed Afghan families who had community sponsors**
3. **To build rapport and connections across agencies and staff who are engaging in community sponsorship**

Prior to the convening, RWC conducted in-depth interviews with participants to begin a process of documenting lessons learned, challenges, and opportunities pertaining to community sponsorship – insights collected from a year of expedited program development. Data collected from the interviews are presented in poster format by organization in Appendix II.

The data and trends presented in this report were gathered from insights shared at the December 14 and 15 convening and from interview notes. An experiential trend was presented as long as it was shared by at least four agencies. By documenting experiential trends across agencies, Refugee Welcome Collective hopes this report will inform even more successful community sponsorship efforts looking forward.



⁵ "Local agencies" is used here to describe any RA affiliate or RA local office that provides direct support to newcomers.

History and Evolution of Community Sponsorship

Community sponsorship (CS), or the method of resettlement that relies on community members' time, knowledge, and financial resources to assist newcomers, has been present in several forms throughout U.S. history. In the aftermath of World War II, a national directive enabled organizations to financially support more than 2,500 refugees.⁶ Similar systems of support were possible for Cuban arrivals in 1962,⁷ and for Southeast Asian refugees in 1975.

Several RAs, for example LIRS, EMM, CWS, and WR, have included CS as a support to their resettlement services for decades with levels of implementation varying across local resettlement offices. Several of these had existing national and local community sponsorship materials as well as local training. Many of these agencies saw a surge in community sponsorship interest with the war in Syria, with large numbers of refugees arriving in 2016. For some, the notion of community involvement is central to the welcoming process.

However, many agencies did not have CS programs institutionalized in their local or national agencies, and there were limited opportunities for those with community sponsorship programs to collaborate or share resources.

As the U.S. made commitments under APA to welcome large numbers of Afghan parolees, broad interest in CS grew amongst key stakeholders, including the U.S. government. The hypothesis was that if community-led support was coupled with agency-led services, then the system could effectively manage the strain of APA newcomers while simultaneously catalyzing greater interest and understanding of refugee affairs within the general public. That hypothesis resulted in the expansion, formalization, and institutionalization of CS at many RAs; establishment of new initiatives and organizations like the Refugee Welcome Collective, Community Sponsorship Hub, and Welcome.US to support and expand CS programming, and new CS program models to realize the promise of CS as an effective method of delivering core services.

Community sponsorship has been used as a support to resettlement services for decades, with levels of implementation varying across local resettlement offices.

To communicate and coordinate more easily between government, funders, and agencies, terminology emerged designed to articulate the types of CS approaches, mainly support teams and co-sponsorship. New models for delivering CS programs were also introduced, including the Sponsor Circle program and Institutional Partners. The approaches to CS exist on a spectrum – from less community involvement and more resettlement agency involvement, to complete community ownership and no agency involvement. More specifically, approaches to CS articulated during APA include:

Types of community sponsorship defined:

- » **Support Teams:** Lesser U.S. community involvement; greater local agency leadership. Support Teams are groups of community members who support staff (usually case managers) to provide some, but usually not the majority of, core services to a single newcomer, a family, or groups of families. Support Teams do not require the execution of an MOU between community members and the agency. Support Teams are often required to provide some kind of financial contribution starting at ~\$500, though some raised much more.
- » **Co-sponsorship:** Community leadership, local agency collaboration. Co-sponsorship is a form of

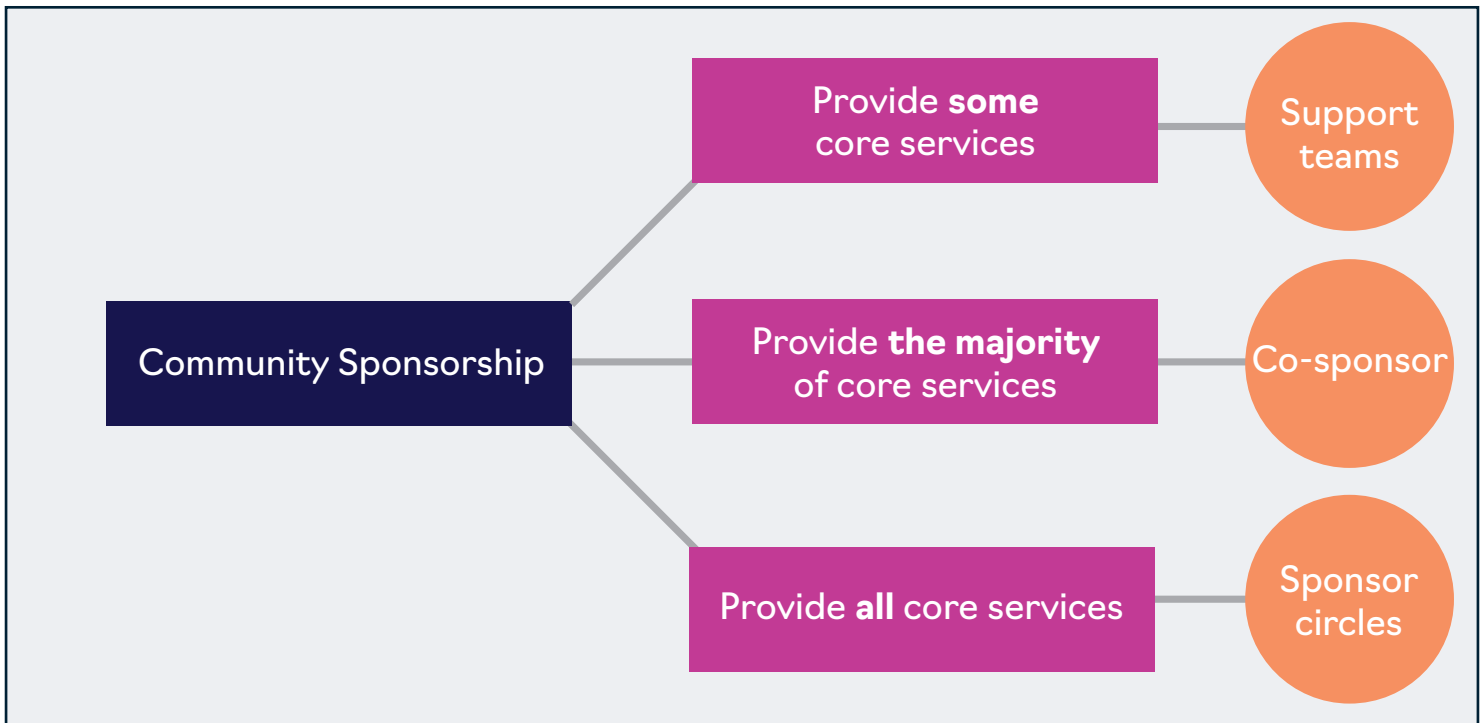
⁶ Stenning, R. (1996). *Church World Service: Fifty Years of Help and Hope*. New York: Friendship Press. Page 50

⁷ Stenning, R. (1996). *Church World Service: Fifty Years of Help and Hope*. New York: Friendship Press. Page 32

CS in which community members provide a majority or all of the core services to an individual newcomer, a family, or group of families. This requires a signed MOU with a local agency, the group to be paired with one family or case, and in most cases, to make financial or in-kind contributions ranging between \$500 and \$15,000+. Because co-sponsors are delegated full responsibility for many or all core services, local agencies play a significant role in training and supporting the co-sponsors.

and HIAS) who provide remote support. Afghan newcomers who opted into Support Circles consented to opt out of the financial support offered through APA (a per capita allotment of \$1,225 for direct assistance). However, the Sponsor Circles provided the equivalent amount of \$1,225 (at a minimum – many provided much more) via private fundraising. After the first 90 days, agencies can assist newcomers in accessing additional services from the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), depending upon availability.

Table A: types of CS programs



New programs introduced to expand CS opportunities included:

» **Sponsor Circles:** *Community leadership, no local agency involvement.* Sponsor Circles provide all core services to an individual newcomer, a family, or group of families. Sponsor Circles differ from co-sponsorship because they do not work in collaboration with local agencies during the first 90 days after the newcomers' arrival. Sponsor Circles are matched with newcomers through Community Sponsorship Hub and assigned for oversight to one of several umbrella organizations (Home for Refugees, React DC, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services, EMM, IRC,

» **Institutional partners:** Church World Service (CWS) created a model to train and equip organizations to serve as APA resettlement providers. Institutional partners hired a team of dedicated staff at the national level to support the implementation of the APA program within their network of congregations and organizations who served as community partners. Institutional partners were provided tools, resources, training, and weekly technical assistance during the APA program. Institutional partners that partnered with CWS during the APA program were Samaritan's Purse, Islamic Relief, and Lions Club International.

Finally, some agencies partnered directly with universities and other institutional partners to welcome Afghan parolees. These partnerships don't fall neatly into any of the above categories, as the partnerships are formalized between RAs and institutions rather than directly with sponsors. For example, IRC Phoenix partnered with Arizona State University, which sponsored 67 Afghan women. The university provided full tuition, housing, medical care, and community.

The terminology above is already shifting. In particular, the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migrants (PRM) has ceased using the term "Support Teams" in their cooperative agreements (though still recognize it as a form of important community volunteering).⁸ Many organizations continue to use the Support Team definition to guide their internal tracking and monitoring of community engagement.

"Chaos" and "mayhem" were among the descriptors CS staff used for the period. CS became one mitigation method among methods that enabled the successful management of OAW's fast-paced arrivals.

Growth During APA

Before APA, 35 local agencies had CS programs, many nascent or in their infancy. During APA, at least 95 of the country's more than 250 affiliates developed new programs, or continued or expanded existing CS programming. Exact numbers of co-

sponsorship groups and support teams is unknown, but RWC estimates that at least 7,667⁴ newcomers benefited from at least 437⁵ support teams and 732⁶ co-sponsorship groups.⁷ Furthermore, three RAs (IRC, HIAS, and EMM) organized and supported 56 remote Sponsor Circles, and CWS enabled 41 sponsor groups through their institutional partners Samaritan's Purse and Islamic Relief.

This growth was possible for at least two reasons. The first was extreme need. Given the numbers and pace of arrivals during APA, it was not feasible to support all clients with existing models alone. "Chaos" and "mayhem" were among the descriptors CS staff used for the period. CS became one mitigation method among methods that enabled the successful management of OAW's fast-paced arrivals. For the first time, many teams saw CS programs as a necessity, rather than as an ad hoc add-on.

The second reason for this growth of CS programs was the increased availability of sources of financial and technical support. Funding for CS programs came from multiple sources, most notably the Community Sponsorship Hub's Catalyst Fund. In 2022, the Community Sponsorship Catalyst Fund (Catalyst Fund) had 40 active grants with 41 organizations. Through grants with local, regional, and national grantees, CSH supported community engagement and co-sponsorship programs in approximately 110 local offices across 37 states and the District of Columbia. Since the first round of funding was disbursed in January 2020, over 4.1 million dollars has been provided to Catalyst grantees.

Another noteworthy supporter of CS was the U.S. government's Local Capacity Development Fund

3 As articulated by PRM at the December 15 session, the decision to cease use of Support Teams should not be interpreted as a lessened interest in the program, but rather as an interest in simplifying terminology.

4 This figure includes Support Teams estimates from the affiliate networks of ECDC, HIAS, USCRI, USCCB, CWS, World Relief, IRC and EMM.

5 This figure includes Support Teams estimates from the affiliate networks of ECDC, HIAS, USCRI, USCCB, CWS, World Relief and EMM. 23 of these groups were facilitated through CWS's Headquarters-led Community Partners program.

6 This figure includes Support Teams estimates from the affiliate networks of ECDC, HIAS, USCRI, USCCB, CWS, World Relief and EMM.

7 These estimates were based on self-reported estimates, and are inexact due to significant differences in reporting techniques. In some cases, agencies tracked numbers and types of CS groups. In other cases, agencies tracked clients reached with CS programs. The agencies are now working to standardize counting practices. The numbers presented here are an extrapolation of overall figures based on available data and may be an underestimation of CS reach.

(LCDF), which offered support to offices to quickly ramp up during APA. In many instances, RAs chose to use this funding to support CS programs, though it was not explicitly earmarked for it. In limited cases, RAs used available unrestricted resources to fund CS programs amongst affiliates. For example, LIRS

launched an internal grantmaking opportunity to which offices could apply. Four received funding to launch CS programs. It is unclear at this time which of these funds will be renewed, or at what level.



Experiential Trends Across Agencies

Experiential trends – both regarding what went well, what was learned, and what remains a challenge – were strong across agencies. The overwhelming sentiment was that when structured for success (including operationally, financially, and programmatically), community sponsorship is a powerful model for welcoming newcomers and for refugee integration. Below are the strongest experiential trends articulated by the CS experts who attended RWC's December 14 and 15, 2022 peer learning convening.

What's Working and Observed Impact

A year of working on CS programs has shown they are of tremendous benefit as one model of resettlement. Below are five key experiential trends regarding what is working and observed impact:

1. Increased office capacity and caseload relief: Participating RAs and offices found that community sponsorship programs were crucial: without them, it would not have been feasible to manage APA arrivals. Of the nearly 70,000 arrivals, at least 8,375 received services through community sponsorship (nearly 12%). Where case managers were already overwhelmed, CS programs made it possible to serve clients successfully.

The majority of agencies also viewed CS as a primary strategy for mitigating case manager burnout during APA. Burnout is an industry-wide problem for RAs and their affiliates. It was especially an issue at the start of APA given that agencies had been downsized under the previous administration and had not yet grown to match the R&P commitments under the current administration, let alone the APA commitments. This meant the weight on existing case managers was especially high as APA was implemented. Though burnout remained a challenge, agencies believe sponsor involvement prevented some turnover. EMM, for example, tracked a 230% increase in volunteer hours between FY21 and FY22¹ – a tremendous value-add to case managers in a particularly challenging time. Some agencies found that partial handover

of core services (e.g. two to five core services) did not relieve pressure on case managers. Other agencies found that certain responsibilities (like airport pick-up) were a valuable time-saver when handed over to a sponsor team regardless of whether or not they provided additional services.

The use of institutional partners to increase capacity to manage sponsorship was rare during APA, and many RAs struggled to locate the right partners. But in some cases, institutional partners proved helpful with office capacity and caseload relief. For example, CWS institutional partner Islamic Relief (IR) supported LIRS in addressing their walk-in list in Northern Virginia, which had grown to hundreds-long. CWS matched IR to 111 individuals/54 cases with sponsors to support LIRS in alleviating the length of the walk-in list.



2. Increased quality and duration of care: Agencies repeatedly cited the quality and duration of support as a standout benefit of CS programs. The care that can be provided from a multi-member group of sponsors is often extraordinary in comparison to what can be provided by a single case manager and staff who may support more than 10 families at once. For example, a 14-person family

¹ Data presented by EMM at the peer convening on December 14, 2022

arrived in central Missouri in September 2021 and was matched with a co-sponsorship group through USCCB affiliate Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri (CCCNMO). Although the sponsors met with every realtor in the area, they had a very difficult time finding housing due to occupancy limits and the family's lack of credit history. But the sponsors were diligent: they approached Habitat for Humanity, who agreed to build the family a home. Although a case manager may wish to provide this kind of above-and-beyond support, their caseloads make it impossible.

Furthermore, whereas a case manager steps away at the 90-day mark to welcome a new family, a dedicated sponsorship team is likely to support for a longer period of time. In some cases, agencies have mandated a longer timeframe for CS (in comparison to the standard 90-day mark for R&P). ECDC, for example, mandated a nine-month commitment from its sponsors, and nearly all their affiliates required their sponsors to adhere to this criterion. Other agencies mandated six months.

Even where agencies did not have an exact timeframe mandated, CS staff saw a long-term relationship organically emerge between sponsors and newcomers. Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), a CWS affiliate operating in Connecticut, observed that newcomers often stay connected to their sponsors socially and personally long after they've become financially independent and the formal sponsorship has ended, indicating that there is value to the relationship beyond the initial sponsor-newcomer relationship. As articulated by the African Community Center in Denver (ACC-DEN), an ECDC affiliate, access to a high-quality community sponsor team creates a "softer and stronger" landing in the U.S.



3. Increased financial support for newcomers: It is broadly recognized that the \$1,225 per capita amount is insufficient for most newcomers to facilitate integration. In practice, families need to locate additional support by enrolling in other social benefits, accessing donations from faith-based groups, and by continued engagement with the local resettlement agency beyond the 90-day mark. For example, a USCRI affiliate in Providence, Rhode Island reported that a community group of 10 to 12 members raised \$10,000 to support an APA case of six family members. RAs agree that community sponsorship can generate more robust and long-term financial and in-kind resources for newcomers to supplement sometimes precarious safety nets. In many instances RAs witnessed the per capita support amplified by *hundreds per month* due to the fundraising of sponsors.

Agencies note, however, that with sponsor teams raising differing amounts, support across clients may not be equitable. Some agencies provide fundraising advice and usage protocols to promote equity across clients as additional resources are raised.

4. Creating community champions, refugee advocates, and donors: Participating agencies found that CS programs engage the U.S. general public substantially, creating champions and donors for refugee affairs in new and sometimes surprising ways. Some noted that CS gave the general public a way to put their energy to use, especially during APA when many pockets of the American public were driven to lend a hand.

USCCB affiliate Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri (CCCNMO) found this to be one of the most pronounced benefits of CS programs. Whereas CCCNMO used to have 11 staff working in an office to generate a welcoming environment

Community sponsorship programs have also shown to catalyze new private funding sources for refugee issues, even beyond support for a matched newcomer or family. Many sponsors invested not only in their sponsored family, but also in the agencies' overall needs, increasing deeply appreciated and useful unrestricted funding. EMM, for example, found that they experienced a 90% increase in individual donations between FY21 and FY22. This growth coincided with the growth of their CS programs across affiliates.² Note, however, that this increase may be due to other correlated factors, including that the situation in Afghanistan and resulting evacuations were prominent in the news.



for arrivals, they now have 160+ active community sponsors who are champions for refugee inclusion. By gaining personal experiences that impact their viewpoints and/or increase awareness, sponsors help to create a more accepting community overall. Quantifying this benefit is difficult, but agencies cite experiencing more welcoming attitudes within local establishments since the growth of CS programs.

The experience of being a sponsor has also led many people to contribute to advocacy efforts relevant to the refugee community. For example, in Charlottesville, Virginia, IRC shared that a group of community sponsors became involved in advocacy for the Afghan Adjustment Act by writing letters to senators and creating petitions. In this example, a CS program turned communities who were otherwise unfamiliar with situations of forced displacement into allies for their new neighbors.

² Data presented by EMM at the peer convening on December 14, 2022.

5. Expanded footprint for resettlement, and in places with lower cost of living: Community sponsorship has proven useful due to its ability to support placements in locations more than 100 miles from the nearest resettlement agency. Specifically, Support Circles, remote placement, collaboration with institutional partners, allow for new places to emerge as viable placement locations.

Forexample, CWS had a trusted community sponsor, a church, identified through Institutional Partner Samaritan's Purse, who was ready to welcome two Afghan families in a remote area of North Carolina. Although the State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) was concerned the location would not be able to create a welcoming atmosphere due to its remote nature, and orientation as a university town where employment is often seasonal, CWS and Samaritan's Purse believed the location could provide a strong start for newcomers. The families were received so well that there is now another family overseas who has requested

placement in the same town. This example helps to highlight a core belief of many agencies: anyone anywhere can welcome newcomers when they have the will, effective support, community resources, and information needed to succeed.

In many cases, remote placements allow for lower cost of living for newcomer families. This may make for an easier road to integration. IRC shared that in Virginia, more than 60 people were resettled for the first time outside of Charlottesville into new, more affordable communities. With this expansion, families were able to access affordable housing and gain access to a larger network of new community resources. Some agencies caution, however, that proper assessment using effective criteria must be done on any location before placement. An accurate assessment process for remote placements merits ongoing development.



Lessons Learned

Given the fast-paced nature of CS expansion under APA, the learning was both broad and deep across agencies. As everyone “built the plane while flying it,” lessons were quickly learned and course corrections swiftly put into action. The following seven experiential trends in lessons learned are presented below:

1. Staffing for CS: An overwhelming finding is that successful CS programming requires CS-specific staffing at both local agency and national RA levels. In instances where this was missing, CS programming was difficult to implement and sustain, and led to poor sponsor-agency relations. Without dedicated staffing, sponsor management fell entirely on case manager shoulders, who typically did not have the skills or time to manage volunteers in addition to their other responsibilities. This may have contributed to case manager turnover. Over the course of the year, *nearly every agency* with a successful CS program added at least one dedicated staff person.

Interestingly, agencies used very different staffing models and have differing viewpoints regarding which roles CS staff should play. In some cases, case managers were highly integrated into sponsor management. In these instances, agencies found that case managers were critical given their understanding of the service environment. In other cases, case managers were not at all involved (e.g. CWS affiliate IRIS in Connecticut, where CS staff called “sponsor coaches” are in an entirely different department from case managers).

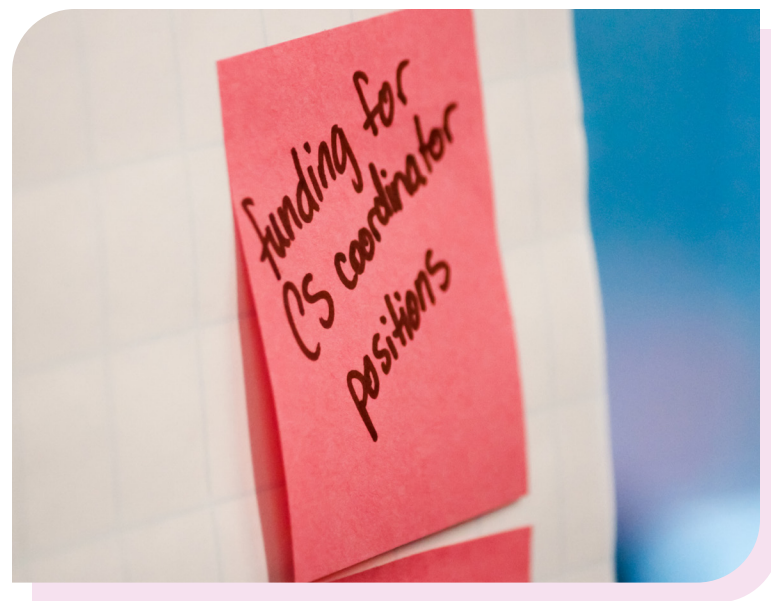
In practice, agencies that had separated the CS role from case manager role tended to have larger, more robust programs. And, in many cases, agencies that made case managers not the primary contact for sponsors experienced fewer problems with sponsor communication and sponsor relations.

Despite differences in models, most agencies say their model works for them. Where organizations are in agreement is regarding what responsibilities need to be explicitly

identified and placed within a specific job description. Those responsibilities include:

» **Sponsor recruitment:** Sponsor recruitment, or the process of identifying groups and, if required, building and executing an MOU, is a core responsibility that someone needs to own. The strongest programs create a “pipeline” of sponsors in which there are new groups added with an intentional frequency. In most cases, this was firmly within the job description of a CS staff person. At IRIS in Connecticut and among several IRC offices, the sponsor recruitment role was separated out as a standalone position. IRC and IRIS agree this has led to larger, more robust programs. For example, IRIS supported 215 clients through 38 co-sponsorship groups between September 2021 and September 2022.

During APA, many local offices had volunteers come to them given the prominence of OAW in the news. Moving forward, many agencies plan to consider how to formalize their recruitment of new sponsors.



» **Sponsor training:** Sponsor training is a crucial aspect of the program, and it is important for someone to own the process of developing and delivering training. Topics on the “what” of sponsorship include roles and responsibilities of sponsors vs. newcomers vs. agencies, the delivery of core services, fundraising, and

administrative responsibilities like accounting and case notes. Topics on the “how” of sponsorship include intercultural communication (including interpersonal and cross-cultural conflict resolution), power and privilege, trauma-informed care, strength-based approaches, safeguarding for children, and mental health and domestic violence response. In nearly all successful cases, this role was taken on largely by a CS staffer, where other staff (including case managers) provide support specific trainings.

» **Ongoing sponsor communication and offboarding support:** Nearly all agencies learned that it is crucial to have a single person serve as communication liaison between the sponsors and all other staff. Without this person, communication can be overwhelming for staff and frustrating for sponsors. During the end of the sponsor-newcomer relationship, agencies found that a staff person often needed to support the sponsors in making the transition to a new kind of relationship. In some cases, this responsibility was owned by a single CS staffer; in others, it was a case manager.

2. Hiring for the volunteer management skill set: Sponsor relations is ultimately a form of volunteer management. In many cases, agencies found that their existing, primarily client-facing staff did not have a robust volunteer management skill set, which includes strong inter-cultural and often inter-generational communication skills, the ability to set and maintain boundaries, and strong interpersonal problem-solving abilities. In response, many agencies prioritized hiring CS staff who had prior experience running volunteer programs. The addition of someone with this skill set promoted sponsor retention over time.

3. On which clients are good candidates for CS: Agencies agree that sponsorship is an extraordinarily useful addition to resettlement models in the U.S. for many, but not all newcomers.

Nearly all agencies found that sponsorship was particularly useful in supporting newcomers without U.S. ties. Those with U.S. ties are more likely to move to new locations, and are more likely to have built-in support, making

sponsorship less important or unnecessary.

Some found that those who are placed outside a close radius of local agencies are most likely to benefit from sponsorship. What constituted “close radius” differed in different locations (ranging from 45 miles to 100 miles), due to differences in the scope of urban sprawl or the size of specific cities. Some found this distance was important so that sponsors and agencies weren't competing for the same housing for their clients. Others found it was useful to foster autonomy among sponsors. Those who embraced Support Teams, however, didn't find that distance was as important a factor, as case managers and sponsors divided the work and collaborated.



Some agencies felt that sponsors were especially useful for complex cases (e.g. larger families, single mothers, newcomers with disabilities). Others felt that the more complex cases should stay with case managers. Deciding whether to match a case with sponsors, or to keep the case tied to a case manager was complex for many agencies. Because of the complexity, many agencies build a decision-making process to help guide case assignments, like [this one prepared by World Relief](#).

Perhaps most importantly, agencies agree that the matching process should carefully assess whether the sponsorship team has the right skills to support the unique circumstances of each newcomer.

4. **On CS program components:** Agencies discovered several program components that support CS success, including:

» **Having the right-sized sponsorship teams:** Agencies learned that ideal sponsor teams are likely no fewer than six people and no greater than 15. When fewer than six are involved, the workload is too great for each person. When entire parishes with 40+ active sponsorship members are involved, there isn't enough work for everyone and CS staff struggle to manage expectations.

» **Intentional recruitment is crucial for success:** Agencies shared that recruitment strategies should be targeted and creative. Outreach to service clubs and ministries across faiths can be great starting points. When done with intention, proper recruitment can support cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity within and amongst sponsor teams.



updated with key, succinct information. IRIS, in contrast, asks the sponsors themselves to do core service mapping during the sponsor recruitment phase as a kind of vetting for preparedness.

» **A process for staggering the onboarding and matching of sponsors with newcomers** in order to manage workload: On teams that divided the sponsor recruitment role from the sponsor training and support role, this staggering was less important.

» **Establishing the requirement for a financial plan** from sponsors for how funding would be raised, used, and managed: This should include accounting, budgeting, and banking practices in addition to a thoughtful fundraising plan.

» **Establishing systems for knowledge management:** Different organizations provided different tools for their sponsors to track case notes, financial contributions, and in-kind donations such as Better Impact and Salesforce, although most expressed frustration that these tools weren't user-friendly or well-customized to meet their needs. In most cases, knowledge management remains a challenge.

In response, RWC developed the [RWC App](#), which was designed specifically to meet the tracking needs of sponsors and agencies alike. Among other functions, the RWC App allows sponsors to record case notes, financial contributions, and in-kind gifts, and allows agencies to monitor client engagement, track training completion, and store sponsor commitments including MOUs.



» **Developing location-specific guidance for core service delivery that is short and digestible:** While RA-level or network-level templates are helpful as a starting point, templates need to be highly customized for sponsors so they can execute efficiently. For example, local agencies should prepare guidance on the exact locations and contact for benefits offices, exact transportation routes, and exact housing development. ACC-DEN, for example, has created materials known as "task guides" for each core service, which is regularly

The RWC App is currently available for use.

- » **The development of a site-specific, thoughtful, and flexible approach to newcomer-to-sponsor matching** that acknowledges the complexity of each newcomer and the skills within each sponsorship group. This process should begin with identifying who is and who is not a good candidate for community sponsorship at all, and then move into who are the right sponsors for each family.
- » **A robust training program that addresses the before and during sponsorship training needs for sponsors:** While all agencies anticipated the importance of the “before” training, they learned over time how important ongoing training was, especially for preventing long-term dependency on sponsors. Importantly, agencies found that training should be practically minded with an emphasis on providing case studies and exercises.



- » **An emphasis on working toward newcomer independence** should permeate training and support for sponsors during recruitment, training, support, and offboarding. Agencies found that many sponsors were very inclined to “do for” rather than “teach to” or “do with.” Agencies learned the importance of identifying early warning signs of dependency and addressing it directly. Other ideas raised by the network include having a

meeting the with sponsor teams at the five- to six-month mark to proactively encourage tapering off involvement, developing a guide for both families and teams on what friendship looks like outside of the sponsor relationship, and supporting teams to identify what are the highest needs to address before moving out of the support period.

5. **On good sponsor relations:** Sponsor relations is a core aspect of CS success. Good relations start with clarity around roles and responsibilities between and amongst the sponsors, the agency, and the newcomers themselves. This breakdown of roles and responsibilities will differ depending on the type of sponsorship (Support Teams, Co-sponsorship) and the exact staffing model, but should be communicated, documented, and enshrined in an MOU if applicable. Agencies across the U.S. stressed the importance of this process because it sets CS staff and case managers up to set and enforce boundaries with sponsors.

Another key learning on sponsor relations is around communication. While every agency had a different communication approach, all agreed that a documented plan for communication was crucial. This plan should include the identification of a primary liaison on staff, and the primary liaison(s) on the sponsorship team. It should also include set times for engagement. Some organizations recommended weekly check-ins with sponsors (IRC), while others recommended monthly check-ins (CCCNMO). Others had set times such as the 10-, 45- and 90-day mark (IRIS). These communication practices helped teams to avoid commonly experienced pratfalls like emails in which entire departments or teams are cc-ed, or frequent ad hoc phone calls to CS staff or case managers.

Finally, several creative sponsor support mechanisms – other than one-to-one check-ins with staff – were shared, including ECDC affiliates’ use of: office hours” during which any sponsorship group can come and ask questions and learn from each other, and CCCNMO’s monthly sponsor-facing newsletter Sponsorship Scoop that shares stories, resources, and opportunities with all teams.

6. Promoting staff buy-in for community sponsorship programs: For many client-facing staff, there was a general hesitation and concern about handing over core services to sponsors, especially at the early stages of APA, out of fear that services would not be delivered in a respectful or thorough manner. As the fast-paced nature of APA pushed many teams into testing CS as a credible form of client support, teams slowly began to see its value.

As the intensity of APA deescalates, some teams fear that case managers will wish to lessen investment into CS programs. Agencies anticipate that it will become crucial to illuminate the many benefits of CS – far beyond caseload management – to help teams continue matching newcomers with sponsors when it's in the newcomers' best interests.

Some agencies further note that the success of CS programs is highly dependent upon having buy-in from upper-level/senior leadership in order to champion the program in the future.

7. Making space for learning and convening across affiliates and agencies: All agencies expressed deep appreciation for the spaces made to learn from their fellow affiliates within their own networks, as well as across agencies. This was especially helpful to uncover the similarities in experiences, share ideas for addressing key challenges, to provide space to share resources, and perhaps most importantly, to not feel alone. Those spaces included the RCUSA Community Sponsorship working group, the RWC lunch and learn events and membership, and many internal communities of practice.

From these spaces, conveners like RWC learned how they could best provide support to the broader CS community. RWC was able to create an [initial repository of resources](#) available online; work collaboratively with Welcome.US and CSH to develop an initial training for community sponsors, [Community Sponsor Essentials](#); and to spot and address the need for a volunteer management software, which manifested as the [RWC App](#).

Many hope that these tools and collaborations will be further elaborated (e.g. updated collaboratively to include with the vast number of new tools developed over the last six months including LIRS' skills assessment for sponsors process, ACC-DEN's task guides, and beyond), and convenings will continue not just for CS staff, but for all RAs and their affiliates in order to continue to mainstream and develop new and important ideas like community sponsorship. Some ideas raised include the creation of a Microsoft Teams chat across agencies to allow CS staff to connect on a day-to-day basis, and the development of internal working groups to take on specific group interests such as new training materials.



Challenges Observed and Mitigation Strategies

Agencies experienced many challenges during APA, but rapidly addressed many of them and transformed them into lessons learned. The following are three outstanding challenges without certain solutions. In addition to the presentation of the challenges, this section outlines some discussed mitigation strategies for further exploration and/or implementation.

1. Staffing interruptions: Agencies share the values of the current administration, and they deeply support the increase in resettlement numbers and the role of OAW in admitting over 88,500 people into the U.S.. Despite this values alignment, the pace at which agencies had to ramp up support was extraordinarily difficult.

Agencies had been downsized under the previous administration and had not yet grown to meet R&P commitments, let alone APA commitments. The addition of CS programming was also at the heart of these challenges because agencies faced rolling out new programming while growing existing programming. Teams recruited and hired quickly to meet these challenges, and many organizations shared that new staff struggled to understand the processes of R&P, APA, and CS all at the same time.

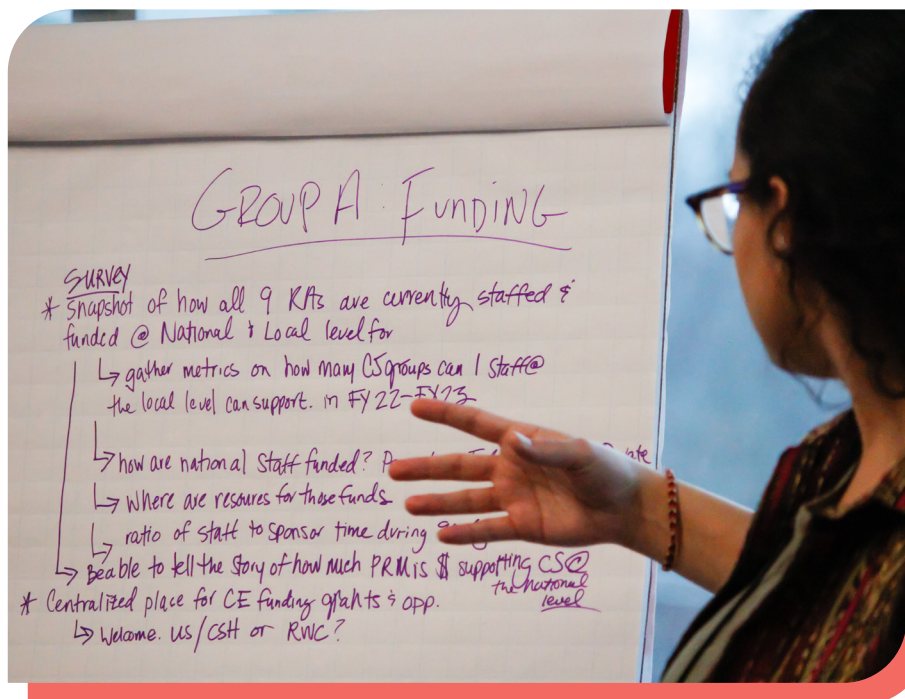
When coupled with below-market salaries, agencies believe these challenges led to staff turnover during APA, especially for client- and sponsor-facing staff. This staff turnover in the midst of rapid arrivals created tremendous stress for all involved.

Although agencies are proud of what they were able to accomplish given the circumstances, they also recognize that quality of programming and support for newcomers is best delivered from seasoned, prepared, and decently-paid staff.

Toward mitigation strategies: Agencies view this set of issues as systemic in nature, and solutions require a bipartisan commitment

to resettlement and better pay. Absent this, agencies will have to withstand frequent periods of growth and contraction, which work against high-quality emergency response, like during APA. Agencies may wish to connect and collaborate alongside various advocacy organizations in sharing this experience with the U.S. government and generating more specific asks for ways of working and ongoing support.

2. Continuation of community sponsorship funding: As mentioned above, funding for CS programming came primarily from the Community Sponsorship Hub, PRM's Local Capacity Development Fund (LCDF), the allocation of administrative funds from PRM R&P contracts, and available agency-specific unrestricted resources.



Agencies expressed uncertainty regarding the continuation of these funds outside of emergency response. Absent ongoing support for CS programming, agencies worry the progress made during APA to provide high-quality CS programs could be jeopardized. This fear is especially acute because historically, community engagement funding “has been the first to go.”

Toward mitigation strategies: Agencies believe that a key to seeing CS programs prioritized starts by “un-siloing” the program in the eyes of all key stakeholders: local agencies, the national RAs, donors, peer institutions, the U.S. government, and the general public. The longstanding viewpoint that CS programs are an add-on rather than a core model for resettlement works against the continuity of CS funding, and therefore the future of CS. Un-siloing community sponsorship may require the development of an informational campaign regarding its value and impact.

Other mitigation strategies may include (1) sharing funding opportunities across agencies and generating a central place for opportunities to live (e.g. on the RWC website); (2) more regular and formalized engagements between CS staff across agencies and PRM; (3) improved data collection methods in order to better tell the CS impact story, and (4) internal advocacy during budgeting in order to see CS prioritized on an agency-by-agency basis. Internal advocacy may begin with simply increasing visibility into the value of community sponsorship. USCCB, for example, does this by embedding a permanent CS section in its weekly resettlement bulletin.



3. Sponsor-generated newcomer dependency:

Across agencies, teams observed newcomer dependency on sponsors that often extended beyond the sponsorship timeframe. Many observed the tendency to “do for” rather than to “teach to” or “do with” amongst sponsors. CS staff and/or case managers addressed this through unexpected intervention during which they encouraged pathways forward that would lead to independence. In some cases, agencies developed a specific system to check for and address dependency, such as CWS’ New Neighbor Plan process which leads sponsors through a process of intentionally and responsibly disconnecting from newcomers starting at the 90-day mark.

Agencies reflected that upfront and ongoing training on topics such as diversity, equity and inclusion, antiracism, power and privilege, trauma-informed care, intercultural learning, and strengths-based approaches may help reduce the likelihood that long-term dependency is created and/or reinforced by sponsors. Such training may help sponsors – especially those who have enjoyed privilege for all their lives – to better see and uplift newcomers as independent, resilient, and in control of their futures.



Although this awareness was shared across agencies, the best approach for issuing such training to sponsors was not yet clear. CS staff and case managers have expressed that they are not comfortable delivering these trainings because they haven't themselves been trained on the topics.

Toward mitigation strategies: Some discussed mitigation strategies may include (1) hiring in-house DEI expertise to guide institutions through the development of a training program targeting staff first, then sponsor-facing training; (2) the

development of a cross-agency digitized training program available to all sponsors, and (3) the development of a set of workshops that offer sponsors a space to reflect on these topics without requiring staff to “train” per se, but rather facilitate reflection. The latter would likely require a robust train-the-trainer program. Agencies agree that however dependency is mitigated, it is important to work closely with experts on key topics to mitigate the risk of inadvertent harm to staff or clients.



Emerging Opportunities and Interests Across Agencies

The peer convening provided opportunities for agencies to discuss several emerging interests and opportunities for joint action and learning. The following areas emerged as critical to the group.

1. Creating more formal channels of communication between CS experts and those working on resettlement funding and models: APA catalyzed an extreme period of learning for CS staff across the country. The historic lessons learned are somewhat captured in this report, but necessarily lack the rich and nuanced experiences of individual teams. New lessons and reflections also continue to emerge.

With this in mind, the CS experts present at the December 2022 peer convening are interested in connecting more regularly with those who make decisions on resettlement funding and models. Through such a space, CS staff can inform U.S. resettlement strategy, including how CS fits into a broader ecosystem of responses, how private sponsorship may impact other forms of community sponsorship, and how newcomers may be best served. Such a space also serves to “un-silo” CS and position it as a central model of operation.

CS staff expressed interest in working together to engender such a space with the U.S. government and donors.

2. Standardized and purposeful data collection for impact storytelling: A major interest across agencies was enhancing data collection on CS programming for learning, compliance, and impact storytelling.

Due to the nature of the emergency and the need for swift action, data collection on CS during APA was ad hoc and inconsistent across agencies, making it difficult to properly reflect on the value and impact of CS as a model of resettlement.

Agencies are therefore interested in jointly conducting or coordinating research and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tactics that will measure client experience, client satisfaction, and client integration as a result of CS. The consideration of “client integration” was of especially high interest and discussed as both concrete outcomes (e.g. newcomers are in school, in work, in stable housing) and measurements that signal belonging and environmental know-how (e.g. newcomers have made friends locally, feel safe, know who to call when needing assistance).

These research and M&E efforts should consider how CS models are complementary and additive to other models, and should include control groups in order to measure how outcomes for R&P clients and sponsored clients differ. Ideally, research can help to illuminate what models of resettlement (including differing models of CS) are best suited for which clients, and which core services are well-suited for sponsor leadership. Such research should be supplemented with illustrative client stories of their experiences with sponsorship.

Agencies believe doing this research together is important in order to support the “un-siloing” of CS programs with key stakeholders, including the U.S. government. By telling a single and powerful impact story,



the community sponsorship community can help to situate sponsorship as a core strategy. Strategies for data collection may include the development of uniform surveys, the use of sponsors to collect data, focus groups with clients, and support from academic researchers.



Some tools already exist that may be relevant to this interest such as the [RISE survey](#) (a global tool developed by Quality Evaluation Designs used to track refugee integration over time)¹, the [FSSP Matrix](#) (used by CCCNMO to gauge refugee self-sufficiency), the RWC baseline survey tool,² and the [RWC App](#). These tools may be useful to reference as agencies begin to coordinate standardized data collection.

3. Diversifying sponsors: Across agencies, the majority of sponsors have tended to be over 50 years of age and White. Agencies hypothesize that this demographic is more likely to engage as sponsors for several reasons, including availability of time and resources. They also may be driven by some of the notions of White Saviorism.³ Some of these factors may contribute to dependency

between newcomers and their sponsors, sponsors lacking an understanding of the realities of poverty in the U.S., and presenting newcomers with an inaccurate picture of diversity in America.

Agencies recognize that many of their current sponsors are playing a crucial and helpful role, but simultaneously see it as imperative to diversify sponsors across many lines: gender, age, race, sexual orientation, economic status, and gender. With this diversification, agencies hypothesize that newcomers may enjoy greater cultural affinity, may be less likely to experience microaggressions or more egregious harm, may be more likely to reach independence faster, and gain a better understanding of the diversity present in the U.S.. Populations of high interest included LGBTQI+-led, Muslim-led, and immigrant-led initiatives and community groups.

Some case studies, such as one in Fort Worth, Texas in which a sponsor team at Arlington Chinese Church supported an Afghan newcomer family, appear to reinforce the viewpoint that strong affinity can grow between newcomers and other immigrant-led sponsor teams.⁴



1 This survey was used in Colorado from 2011-2012 through 2014-2015. The report may provide clarity on the utility of the RISE tool and can be accessed at <https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/rise-year-5-report.pdf>

2 The RWC baseline annual survey collects data from national and local resettlement agencies. Data collected in this form is meant to (1) track the outcomes of the PRM-funded Capacity Building Project for Community Engagement awarded to Church World Services' Refugee Welcome Collective for FY2023 - FY2025 and (2) collect data that may inform work and outcomes of RWC and its Membership. The survey was emailed to RWC Members in 2023 and is currently being analyzed. At the time of publishing this report, findings were not yet publicly available.

3 J. G. (2022, October 1). *What Is White Saviorism And How Does It Show Up In Your Workplace?* Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegas-sam/2022/09/30/what-is-white-saviorism-and-how-does-it-show-up-in-your-workplace/?sh=6f8bb126126d>

4 *Family Amidst Tragedy - how one Good Neighbor Team is providing hospitality and hope.* (2022, May 6). World Relief. <https://worldrelief.org/how-one-good-neighbor-team-is-providing-hope>

Agencies have hypothesized that several steps may support the diversification of sponsors including:

- » Review what exists, especially ECDC's [Wider Welcome training](#), which helps agencies to “critically think through how issues of race, privilege, and bias play out in community sponsorship for refugee resettlement and put strategies in place for overcoming barriers that might exist for diverse and immigrant groups to get involved”;
- » Through intentional community mapping and asset building, build new, proactive, and creative recruitment, including considering more targeted and personal outreach to community groups with different backgrounds;
- » Being much more present and visible in neighborhoods, community centers, and community gatherings where groups with different backgrounds are present, and seek to build a case for mutual benefits between newcomers and prospective sponsor communities;
- » Review components of the program like onboarding, financial commitments, time commitments, and volunteer appreciation to ensure the program is accessible to people of different backgrounds. World Relief noted that many diverse community groups were interested in becoming a CS but lacked the required financial resources. World Relief matched these individuals (many of whom had implicit knowledge of client experiences, community connections, and language assets) with the financial support and American cultural knowledge of another group. Agencies may consider sacrificing previously agreed-upon tenants of the program in order to promote diversity in sponsors, and
- » Reflect on the agency's own diversity and ways of working as a team alongside a DEI expert to understand the implicit ways in which sponsors with other backgrounds may be deterred from participation. Agencies reflected that non-White communities may be less likely to engage as sponsors when the agencies themselves lack diversity.



4. **Generate protocols for university and corporate sponsor engagement:** Several agencies (in particular EMM and IRC) have had success engaging universities as key sponsorship partners. EMM also shared a specific example in which employees of a Macy's store in Houston became a sponsorship team. These limited examples of success have created curiosity amongst agencies regarding how both universities and corporations can be further engaged as sponsors. Looking forward, agencies may wish to collaborate on the exploration and formal documentation of partnership models at both national and local levels.

IRC, who had significant success with university partnerships, recommended exploring partnerships with and resources produced by Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR). More information can be found at <http://everycampusarefuge.net>.

Where national-level partnerships of any kind (including but not limited to those with universities and corporate sponsors) have the possibility of local-level implementation, agencies note the need for a coordination mechanism that provides for transparent matching options between local agencies and corporate and academic partners. This may require a central organizing body like CSH, RWC or Welcome.US to coordinate the development of an online tool, or “one-stop shop” for partnership allocations. With this in mind, and with the support of PRM (through their Capacity Building for Community Engagement fund), RWC is leading efforts to develop a model for national/corporate engagement in co-sponsorship with Welcome.US in FY2023.



5. Safety and safeguarding trainings and strategies:

Over the course of the last year, several safety- and/or safeguarding-related trainings and strategies emerged as crucial for sponsors, yet were missing or underdeveloped across agencies. They included (1) safeguarding for children; (2) mental health emergency response and referrals; (3) domestic violence response and referrals, and (4) a grievance policy and protocol which would enable newcomers to seek support in the event of exploitation or abuse by a sponsor. Complex situations related to these topics overwhelmed many sponsors, while others were unaware of their importance.

Agencies agree that the development of these trainings and strategies are especially crucial as Private Sponsorship grows. The greater the distance from a local agency, the fewer built-in checks and balances are present to protect people from harm.

Organizations may wish to collaborate in the generation of some of these trainings, generate a centralized program for sponsors, and/or develop a train-the-trainer program for CS staff and case managers who may be in a position to issue the trainings to sponsors.



Conclusion

APA gave the established resettlement sector the opportunity to reimagine the welcoming of newcomers as a community endeavor. It enabled citizens, businesses, and congregations to contribute to a situation that was very personal and/or compelling to many of the U.S. public. This reimagining has demonstrated that community sponsorship can be one method, among methods, to welcome newcomers quickly and successfully to the United States.

This sentiment is shared. As global displacement numbers continue to rise, the U.S. government, resettlement agencies and their partners, and communities are likely to find that community sponsorship and its different models is the innovation needed to maintain and grow the country's reputation as a safe haven. The Refugee Welcome Collective will continue to bring CS experts from across resettlement agencies together, implementing an building on the action items identified in the gathering (see Appendix I).



Appendix 1: Immediate Action Items

Next Steps for RWC

RWC Membership as a Community of Practice (CoP): The RWC Member gathering solidified Members' interest and commitment to peer learning and developing best practices across community sponsorship programs. Moving forward, RWC proposes to organize the RWC Membership as an active and responsive Community of Practice (CoP). This CoP would provide space for a quarterly meeting and enable members to act together through three to four **practice groups**: internal working groups that will focus on a specialized area of interest, as identified during the December 14 and 15 peer learning convening.

Based on the second day of the gathering, during which members set the agenda based on high-priority issue areas, potential practice groups may include (1) financial sustainability for CS; (2) impact storytelling, data collection, and monitoring, evaluation, learning (MEL); (3) enhanced training, and (4) diversifying recruitment. Practice groups would meet regularly between RWC Member quarterly meetings and develop annual goals and workplans. Goals may build off of initial discussion areas of the gathering, outlined below.



Proposed Practice Group FY23 Focus Area (working titles subject to change)	Goals identified during gathering to be finalized by practice group members
Financial Sustainability for CS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey to identify the different funding models currently paying for community sponsorship staff positions • 1-2 page document summarizing funding models and potential gaps and opportunities • Advocacy talking points/approach for members to use to show funding models that work well for sustainable sponsorship staffing
Storytelling, Data Collection, and MEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review/engage in conversations on updating R&P period report to include CS related questions • Develop a minimum set of questions that all CS programs should be asking
Enhanced Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map existing and needed "soft-skill" training across member organizations • Identify priority soft-skills topic and potential pooled resources for bringing in experts to cover topics • Develop and share key soft-skill topics to support sponsorship staff with "hard-skill" training (baseline and local training materials)
Diversifying Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review, identify, and share resources that promote diversified recruitment strategies across agencies • Generate and share CS program parameters/components that promote inclusive and accessible sponsorship opportunities

In addition, RWC will adapt its former roundtable discussion format to become a **social learning space** to allow for a flexible way to enable social learning without the requirement of a shared

practice or the long-term commitment to develop one. The learning space has been named Sounding Board, and Members and other staff can register and participate by registering on [RWC's website](#).



Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

Elisabeth Benfield, Kate Weatherbee, Sarah Kolsto



Description of CS Programming Under APA

Between September 2021 and September 2022, ECDCC's affiliate network matched **31 teams with 118 individuals, 85% were Afghan placements**. ECDCC affiliates are using co-sponsorship as their main approach, where the sponsor takes on delivery of core services. Some affiliates also use Support Teams.

The ECDCC community sponsorship model criteria are a team size of 7+ people, minimum financial contribution of \$3,000, and a duration of 9 months. Nearly all affiliates adhere to this criteria.

Affiliate Della Lamb in Kansas City matched **62 clients with 3 co-sponsorship teams**.

Affiliate ACC-Driver matched **118 clients with 21 co-sponsorship teams**.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

ECDCC had been developing co-sponsorship within its network prior to APA, and the launch of that programming lined up with the start of APA and the large arrival of Afghan newcomers in many ways, the ECDCC network was ready to launch this programming, although the pace of APA meant some of the intended processes and practices were difficult to maintain.

Looking forward, some affiliates are interested in seeing how the policies and protocols fare on the backside of APA, where a slower pace of arrivals offers the opportunity to test and refine approaches.

Success Story

One Afghan newcomer arrived in Vermont with his sister-in-law, her three children, and his cousin. They were placed with a co-sponsor through ECDCC affiliate MCC-VT. Through his team, which he considers "a family and also a friend," he received support to learn English, move around the town, set medical appointments, and complete all relevant paperwork. The sponsors also helped his sister-in-law and her children settle in. The co-sponsor helped him prepare for his interview and he got a job as a sign/Ad Coordinator at MCC-VT.

He recently announced that he's opening an Afghan restaurant in partnership with two other people who were formerly displaced (four from Afghanistan and one from Libya). The restaurant's first contract was catering food for the MCC-VT's one-year anniversary dinner.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- Surveys from families and teams are overwhelmingly positive. Affiliates note that families with sponsors have stronger networks and community relationships. There is some observed dependency that gets created through sponsorship initially, but the landing in the U.S. is ultimately easier and stronger.

Program Management:

- Quality, upfront training spells success for sponsor teams. ECDCC's sponsor training includes information about refugee basics, team responsibilities, guidelines (e.g., hold your questions until check-in), scenario planning, and logistics. Within these areas, ECDCC affiliates have found that the following are helpful:
 - Provide picture of goal. Study ready for clients
 - Provide site-specific guidance on core services
 - Demonstrate process of case routing
 - Elaborate on dependency scenarios and focus on how/why this happens
 - Incorporate identity work, including recognition of power and privilege

- ECDCC affiliates recognize the need to add in training on trauma-informed care, power and equity, team dynamics including leadership and conflict management, and covering the possibility of abandonment (which can lead to an adopt and to the relationship).

- ECDCC affiliates have identified several program components that are critical for success: developing site-specific guidance for core service delivery, developing the onboarding and matching of CS teams, (not too many at once!), requiring a financial plan for how initial funds will be used and managed, a thoughtful, site-specific approach to matching, and a closing meeting gathering that helps mark the end of the sponsor's role.
- There is some curiosity about turning the training into an online tool to ease burden on CS staff, recognizing that not all sponsorship teams will be comfortable using technology.

Sponsor Relations:

- Sponsorship recruitment strategies should be deliberate, robust, and creative. Ideas for this can include mapping potential sponsors and conducting direct outreach, attending and advertising at public events, and running a special PR campaign that highlights success stories.

- ECDCC has recommended to affiliates that they do not have the case manager (CM) as the primary point of contact for sponsor teams. Instead, they recommend that the sponsor teams engage directly with the CS program manager. In some cases (ACC-DC and DACS) CS staff have explicitly told CMs not to respond as CS team reaches out and to simply forward the message. Affiliates who used this model experienced fewer problems with communication and less frequent CM burnout than those who did not.

- Some ECDCC affiliates held "office hours" where any sponsorship team members can come, ask questions, and learn from one another. This did not replace the need for individual check-ins but invited sponsors feel supported.
- Some affiliates have found that the relationships between sponsors and agency are most successful when the placements are far from the resettlement agency.

Operations and Financing:

- ECDCC and teams have done a lot of reflection on staffing models that support CS programming. They found it is better to have a CS staff person as the primary point of contact for the sponsors, rather than case manager (CM). CS staff people are best for their skills in volunteer management, and ten taught case management – rather than the other way around. This allows pressure on CMs and promotes more effective communication.

- ECDCC affiliates have found that it is impossible to do the work of CS without at least one staff person, and ideally at least two. These positions have proven difficult to hire for, and there has been a lot of turnover due in part due to workload, and likely due in part to low pay.
- Staggered onboarding of sponsorship teams was important to lessen CS staff turnover, which was initially high.

- Looking forward, affiliates are interested in deepening or growing awareness of CS as a model of resettlement, rather than as an add-on or RFP support. At times, sponsors have been viewed by CMs as a way to support them with a complex case, but the affiliates prefer that they think more holistically about the role of sponsors as primary core service providers.

- When hiring for CS staff, it's important to be looking for someone who is both excellent at interpersonal relationship development with sponsors, who is generally friendly and approachable, but who is also able to set and maintain boundaries. This is a difficult position.

Partnerships and Coordination:

- ECDCC has been very cautious with its use of its Community of Practice. It has caused agencies were alliance-driven and reflective of current needs. Commonly, an affiliate will present a challenge to the CoP, then another affiliate will share their knowledge, then ECDCC finds a resource and shares it. Affiliates find that the CoP is more than just "holding a meeting every month" but instead has useful structure to offer call.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenge: It has been observed in places that dependency between sponsors and the families can form. This happens because sponsors don't test and maintain boundaries, and/or by doing "for" rather than "teaching to." Across ECDCC affiliates, concerns have been raised about over-involved volunteers undermining a family's self-sufficiency.

Solution: ECDCC affiliates recommend that training include scenarios on what dependency is and what it means for a family. CS staff should also pay attention to warning signs that dependency is happening and address it directly. Other ideas raised by the network include having a meeting with sponsor teams at the 60-month mark to proactively encourage training of involvement, developing a guide for both families and teams on what friendship looks like outside of the sponsor relationship, and supporting teams to identify what are the highest needs to address before moving out of the support period.

Challenge: Across sites, getting sponsors to take diligent case notes proved difficult. Sponsors often fail to do them or do so inadequately. The result is that CMs do not have the right documentation for matching grants and PC, in addition to organizational learning.

Proposed solutions: Emphasizing the importance of case notes during initial onboarding is of course important, but it's not enough to ensure proper documentation. MA-COCC and MCC-Whasau, they have explicitly named the sponsor team lead as the person responsible for taking notes and make that a part of a weekly call. Some of the affiliates have noted that case notes are extra complicated when a family is split into multiple cases; they've been to avoid giving sponsors one of these types of cases.

Challenge: It is very important to explore how we can bring more diversity onto co-sponsorships teams, who are currently predominantly older and White.

Solution: This may be an important topic to consider as a group. The "When Welcome strategies may be useful, and they include: maximizing connections of agency staff and clients, analyzing client demographics, offering opportunities for progressive involvement (for saving for CS immediately), and pairing people together if certain tasks present barriers (such as fundraising).

Challenge: Now that APA is ending, at times it has been harder to match clients to sponsors. Many newcomers have fled to the U.S. which may lessen the need for support, and/or mean a client wants to live closer to the family and not where available sponsors reside. The affiliates have found that sponsorship groups are most useful when they are living in the location that the newcomer is placed. This means currently there are sponsorship teams waiting for someone to support. If they wait too long, these teams may dissolve. This is not ideal as sponsors have proven crucial for emergency response.

Solution: Some affiliates question whether we can identify the role of a sponsor even if there is a family, i.e. Some believe there is a different but important role to uncover in order to retain the interest of groups.

Challenge: Funding for CS grew under APA due to APA-specific funds and the Community Sponsorship Catalyst Grants. In order for the benefits of community sponsorship to continue and grow, ECDCC recommends pursuing sustainable funding through formal channels. Currently, there is not a way to pursue sustainable funding for CS through PFD or ORR.

Solution: Unclear at this time, Affiliates are pursuing funding for this work in their own ways.



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program



Refugee Welcome
Collective

Jessica Garross

Description of CS Programming Under APA

Between September 2021 and September 2022, 27 of LIRS' 60 affiliates provided some form of community sponsorship or volunteer engagement, most as Support Teams who provided 6+ of core services to clients.

Each affiliate's approach is different because LIRS takes a hands-off approach to program design. Because agencies have different staffing structures and their environments have different costs of living, the core components of the project differ. For example, program lengths range from 3 - 12 months, and financial commitments range from \$500 - \$10,000.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- The LIRS sponsorship model is valuable because it's a partnership between the experts and community members and leads to healthier communities overall.
- There has been an extraordinary amount of positive feedback from both clients and staff. Many affiliates have expressed that they would not have survived APA without their sponsorship program. Sponsors were especially important for housing, employment, and friendship.

Program Management:

- Arguably the most important lesson of the year was the importance of high-quality training for sponsors and staff alike. For staff, many didn't feel equipped to lead sponsor training on complex topics like equity, trauma-informed care, conflict management, or financial management (to name a few). Looking forward, LIRS intends to build a train-the-trainer on these topics in order to instill confidence in the staff as they prepare sponsors.

Sponsor Relations:

- During the first, LIRS has learned that it is important to set very clear expectations with sponsors, to clarify roles and responsibilities between the staff, sponsors, and clients, and to set clear communication protocols.

Operations and Financing:

- Affiliate with dedicated staffing for CS programs have been much more successful. LIRS ran an internal grant-making process and have funded four full-time positions at four sites.

- At some LIRS affiliates, case managers (CM) are highly involved. At others, the CS staff person is the intermediary between the sponsor and the CM. LIRS has seen many different models work, but perhaps it has been most successful when sponsors engage directly with the CM. That said, it's crucial that there are good communication protocols in place that protect against CM burnout.

- LIRS has found that having the CMs involved promotes quality of programming and ensures services are provided properly.

Partnership and Coordination:

- Over the past year, LIRS has created a co-sponsorship starter kit that includes a commitment form, outreach presentations, trainings, feedback survey examples, skills assessment for the sponsors to help with the matching process, excel planning sheet for co-sponsors, and beyond.

- Looking forward, LIRS is planning more resources, including some that are sponsor-facing. LIRS is also about to begin its own Internal CoP in January.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenge: While LIRS has been able to find some full-time positions for CS staff, and some were able to find the funding within their current budgets, many affiliates do not yet have dedicated staffing. This is a major issue. LIRS is also concerned about the sustainability of the program given the sector's history of de-prioritizing community engagement in moments of duress. For example, in 2016, the community engagement staff were the first to be cut. This is particularly troublesome given that just a few years later there was the largest inflow the system has ever dealt with in history. Contracting and expanding is less conducive to high-quality support for clients.

Proposed Solution: The system, including the USC, needs to consider community sponsorship as a core method of resettlement. How can the network work together to promote sustainable funding for community sponsorship?

Challenge: LIRS has noted the importance of working with sponsors who will not promote a sense of dependency and "doing for," but often this is obscured by staff. While training is the theoretical solution to this, adding additional training (beyond information about core service provision) on other complicated topics may deter people from participating in the program.

Proposed solution: One strength-based solution to this is diversifying the sponsor pool to include more people with less experience as a person of color and/or being in poverty. These sponsors may be less likely to support clients in a manner that leads to dependency. This is more representative of the country as well.

Challenge: Many LIRS affiliates are seeking guidance on how to support sponsors in managing the funds they raise. They are interested in understanding best practices on where the money is stored, how it is budgeted during the sponsorship period, and what controls are needed.

Challenge: LIRS has found that it's difficult to get client feedback on their experiences with sponsors. LIRS suspects cultural norms and/or fear of backlash may dissuade clients from sharing their experiences openly. LIRS is interested in collecting best practices from other ROs and affiliates.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

In 2016, LIRS had a program called Circle of Welcome that was intended to operate as full co-sponsorship. Within the LIRS environment, it didn't work very well. LIRS encouraged their affiliates to show what worked about the program and set the rest aside. Some LIRS offices were still using the model at the start of APA, but most were not.

APA was an opportunity to re-prioritize sponsorship, however, a lot of sites didn't have the time or information to structure their CS programs. Now, LIRS is building the scaffolding needed for sustained sponsorship efforts.

LIRS' intention is to provide support to their network for co-sponsorship. They will do for RFP. This led to a new position being created at LIRS whose role it is to generate resources and offer ongoing technical assistance.

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

Isil Nart-Alexander



Description of CS Programming Under APA

Between September 2021 and September 2022, EMM ran 30 co-sponsor groups and 36 support teams across 11 affiliates. These groups have been responsible mainly for airport pick-up, transport, school enrollment, prep for job interviews, and assisting with initial community integration (i.e. grocery shopping, preparation of welcome meals).

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- APA gave community members the opportunity to actively participate in resettlement. This serves to highlight that everyone can have a role to play in addressing humanitarian crises.
- Despite the pace of arrivals under APA, many RAs together with PRM, ORR, and other government agencies showed that it's possible to support people quickly and that communities can be a part of the solution. This experience helps to show that we can be ready for the next emergency—and this time with best practices in hand.
- Community sponsorship has helped to show that cross-felt support is possible and beautiful. For example, Jewish organizations supported Muslim Afghan arrivals.

Program Management:

- The importance of good training for sponsors cannot be overstated. Among other things, training can help to ensure that sponsors understand the process of accessing core services and can lessen frustration when there are predictable delays in a benefits process (e.g. employment authorization cards).
- As client and agency needs come to the surface, EMM is now targeting those volunteers who can best respond to those needs through their recruitment strategies.
- EMM is interested in learning more about private sponsorship as a possible programmatic addition.

Sponsor Relations:

- EMM found that sponsorship groups can come from anywhere. Many's in Houston, TX, put together a co-sponsor group. Universities were also unique partners.
- EMM has experienced a lot of support from volunteers for in-kind donations of money and goods, but less willingness to donate personal time to support clients in-person. In some cases, this appeared tied to COVID. In other instances, it appeared to be laden with bias about the backgrounds of newcomers. EMM found that they could address some of the biases of sponsors by providing objective information about the vetting process overseas and by the USG, and by focusing on the positive contribution of refugees to the American economy.
- EMM found that turning cultural events, like Kite Running, that brought together groups of sponsors and clients was also a good way to help address the biases people carry about people from the Middle East. Going forward, EMM wants to incorporate more womanly/cultural learning opportunities when sponsors learn more about the cultures of those they are sponsoring, in addition to clients learning about American culture.

Operations and Franchising:

- EMM has learned the importance of data collection but struggled to obtain a lot of data during the first half of 2022. Now, EMM is catching up and building systems that properly capture sponsor activities. Currently, EMM uses Better Impact, but the data collection is onerous. EMM is interested in the RMC App because it was built for RA's by RA. EMM would welcome the opportunity to discuss what is working and what isn't working for other agencies regarding data collection.

Partnership and Coordination:

- The RCUISA and RMC groups have been extraordinarily valuable. It is good to know that EMM isn't alone in its challenges and appreciates the opportunity to transition with colleagues across agencies.
- Looking forward, EMM is building a resource library and starting an internal CoP which includes access to various cultural resources.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Housing: Not available, expensive, landlord not always willing to rent to refugees with no credit history.

SS cards and EADs: Massive delays. START system did not function as expected.

Changing concepts and definitions of sponsorship: EMM has a lot of volunteer engagement – some co-sponsors, some support teams, and some very dedicated and committed individual volunteers who, for example, often do airport pick-up. EMM isn't always clear about why these terms matter and, finds that they can sometimes, inadvertently, lessen the value of a single dedicated volunteer. It may be beneficial to track these engagements, too. Additionally, the new NORO from PRM doesn't include the terminology of 'support teams,' and EMM is anticipating that the affiliate will have a lot of questions about what this means.

Volunteer support: Volunteer burnout and frustrations regarding service timelines, changing APA rules, and cultural differences. Many newly hired CS staff had to recruit and train volunteers while ensuring compliant service provision. Need for increased affiliate staff capacity to provide the sponsors with ongoing support and training. One affiliate uses Just Serve and Volunteer Match to recruit volunteers. Need for an integrated intercultural learning approach benefiting both clients and sponsors to ensure learning happens by all parties involved and is not expected only from clients.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

APA provided the funding and support to massively ramp up EMM's community sponsorship program. The biggest change was in staffing. There is no community sponsorship staffer at EMM, as well as with at 70-80% of affiliates.

In general, APA helped EMM see the value of volunteers, and showcased the extent to which things could be delegated (e.g., not having to do airport pick-up brought two hours back into a case manager's day).

Success Story

One student was sponsored through Cornell University and received complete wrap-around support for core services and beyond.



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

Chloe Shiras, Emily Griffith



Description of CS Programming Under APA

Before APA, HIAS had only two affiliates utilizing any type of community sponsorship programming. The influx of Afghan arrivals to underserved local offices, due to the prior administration, catalyzed the need to create community sponsorship programming available to the public to assist in the resettlement and integration of these families and individuals arriving.

Throughout the duration of the APA program a total of 14 local affiliate offices launched community sponsorship programming, eight affiliates with co-sponsor (volunteer groups that help with the majority of core services and sign a non-legally binding commitment form) opportunities and six affiliates with support team (volunteer groups who assist with less than the majority of core services but provide extended mentorship and cultural orientation) opportunities for community groups to engage in.

HIAS also launched "Welcome Circle" (WCS) terminology by Sponsor Circles in which groups of five-to-oh-seven citizens support an APA case completely without the assistance of a local affiliate. 34 Welcome circles were matched to cases, and HIAS Liaisons were available to answer questions as the group assisted in the family or individual's resettlement process.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

HIAS heard directly from local offices they were unprepared for APA after years of record low arrivals. New case managers and understaffed teams felt ill-equipped to provide the best care to each case with the sharp contrast of now receiving some of the highest arrival numbers in decades. Additionally, local offices local receiving hundreds to thousands of calls from interested community groups, local citizens, and corporations to provide support, looking to the office for direction.

The combination of events is how the APA program catalyzed community sponsorship. Resettlement agencies turned to the public and included them in the resettlement and integration process for these newcomers, an option that some agencies may not have turned to under different circumstances. The urgency of the need for additional direct support coupled with the very public evacuation of Kabul garnered significant empathy from U.S. citizens and attention from a record number of volunteer groups, making it easy to recruit volunteers eager to help the budding CS programs in HIAS local affiliates.

HIAS, throughout the APA program, developed two CS roles at the national level to provide the technical assistance support needed at the local level for Welcome Circles and Co-Sponsorship expansion.

Community sponsorship positions (resettlement work as a community-wide effort instead of in its own professional niche) HIAS perceives that the APA crisis elicited a community sponsorship as a national form, and the future of resettlement in the U.S. is intrinsically intertwined with the expansion of community sponsorship. HIAS intends to capitalize on this moment to strengthen its systems and programmatic approaches for the long-term approach of building capacity by serving clients through this model.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

The Value of Community Sponsorship:

- Community sponsorship offers newcomers specialized support in employment, citizenship, finances, housing, and ultimately act as cultural brokers within the community who can facilitate access to pro bono lawyers, dentists, doctors, and other highly skilled and valued members of the community.
- Successful community sponsorship programming allows for increased capacity for affiliates and has the potential to decrease case management burnout.
- Engaging the community in direct resettlement and integration efforts has provided an avenue for individuals and communities who have never been exposed to the realities of refugees and asylum issues to become advocates for immigrant and refugee rights.

Program Management:

- Create standardized templates and documents for all community sponsorship programs such as team structure/jobs, commitment forms, sample budgets, transition templates, and self-sufficiency grants.
- Provide community sponsorship groups access to a staff member dedicated to community sponsorship to ensure services are being provided appropriately and for general support and guidance throughout their volunteer term.
- Develop opportunities for community sponsorship staff to gather to address most needed resources, trainings, and best practices as these programs continue to grow.

Financing:

- The initial financing for staffing of community sponsorship programs was crucial for enabling the growth of community sponsorship across the HIAS network. HIAS used the funding from the Catalyst Grant provided by the Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH) to launch the Co-Sponsorship pilot. The pilot enabled participating affiliates to hire Co-Sponsor Managers who spearheaded the recruitment and onboarding of co-sponsor groups as well as serve as the case manager for the case. Many affiliates prefer this model of having one dedicated staff member to manage co-sponsorship; however, it does require finding additional funding for a full-time staff person's salary. It is unclear to what extent affiliates will be able to finance this work to sustain it.

Operations:

- Historically, many trainings from HQ to affiliates were focused on supporting senior staff in the context of community sponsorship, which is important as the first step towards building a co-sponsor program, it is necessary to work clearly with junior staff and case managers who are doing a lot of the listening with co-sponsors.
- HIAS intends to invest in the development of volunteer management as a core skill across its network, as many staff were not hired for or trained in this kind of resource development. HIAS has found the skills needed for volunteer management are vastly different from those needed for client-facing work.
- Data collection is needed and missing. Currently, HIAS has begun using the software Better Impact and intends to systemize a method for volunteer coordinators to track and report their volunteer hours. This information can be used to help track support for newcomers to more clearly examine the growth and natural recruitment cycle of volunteers.
- Currently-supported Welcome Circle continue to be a very successful program for HIAS, the model of a remote liaison offering advice, guidance, and sometimes just an ear for problem solving and emotional support has led to positive agency-sponsor relationships. This program has now expanded to support Ukrainians in the IJU program as well. This stands in contrast to some of the challenges that have emerged when co-sponsors are paired with clients who also have a case manager. In these instances, miscommunication emerged around roles, responsibilities, and accountability of core services.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenge: In the context of APA, many case managers were hired, asked to learn APA, alongside RFP requirements, and were asked to also participate in the launching of new community sponsorship programs that they had little say in.

Proposed Solution: HIAS is now prioritizing supporting case managers in their complex roles. It is vital to consult with case managers to figure out what works and does not work and how to refine the program with their interests and comfort levels in mind. HIAS is launching a Case Management Co-Sponsor Training for all case managers to utilize that discusses best practices and what to expect in working with a co-sponsor. This engagement helps to foster case manager ownership over the future and success of community sponsorship programming.

Challenge: Due to the rapid-fire nature of the APA program, factors that are often considered before launching a new program were overlooked. These factors include how to maintain healthy boundaries, defining clear roles between volunteers and staff, and deciding methods and standards of collecting data.

Proposed Solution: HIAS will launch a monthly meeting for the 2023 Co-Sponsor Cohort. In this meeting, the eight agencies who are utilizing Co-Sponsor Programming will engage in mentor-mentee relationships pairing offices who have seniority in the realm of community sponsorship and those who are relatively new. These meetings will provide opportunities to discuss challenges and successes as they pertain to program design, recruitment, and management of co-sponsor relations. The Co-Sponsor Specialist at HIAS will support by creating resources, providing training opportunities, and best practices to address existing challenges.

Challenge: Offices that do not engage in community sponsorship feel that volunteer management is too daunting for their agency to take on and are resisting developing community sponsorship programs that could potentially benefit the long-term trajectory of their clients.

Proposed Solution: Showcases tell the stories of clients working with co-sponsors, support teams, or Welcome Circles. HIAS should more regularly, blow-up with clients who were impacted by these groups in a systemized fashion and work with the communications department to format the messaging of the benefits. HIAS will conduct data through a survey that evaluates co-sponsored clients on different measures of successful integration to use as evidence of the benefits of community sponsorship.

Success Story

In a case in Ariz. Aiden, a small child got out of their house because the lock on the front door wasn't working properly. Unfortunately, child protective services got involved and initiated a case to review the child's safety in the home.

At this point the Co-Sponsor Group rallied behind the family, repaired the door and lock, and reassured CPS that these newcomers were fit parents. CPS closed the case without significant intervention once seeing the support the family had in place. In this instance, the Co-Sponsor was playing a cultural brokering role for the family with an unprepared social services provider—CPS. They were also able to provide the unexpected financial support to handle the broken door and lock.

These two activities – for the door and engagement with CPS – would have been outside the responsibility of a case manager's role and would have added tremendous stress to the family as they just began resettling. This story helps to illustrate the ways in which community sponsorship can have tremendous value-add.



Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program



Stacey Clack

Description of CS Programming Under APA

CWS has been welcoming newcomers with the support and guidance of community members for many years which has led to a robust Community Sponsorship program. Under APAs this program grew and strengthened.

Between September 2021 and September 2022, CWS served 7,788 Afghan clients. Of those, 3,868 clients had community sponsorship, 1,438 were supported through co-sponsorship, and 2,433 benefited from support teams.

In FY 22, 45% of our clients served through APA were welcomed through community sponsorship support. Clients that were not matched with community sponsorship were supported by individual volunteers and U.S. Ties. CWS goal is to have 100% of our offices offer community sponsorship programs inclusive of co-sponsorship programs by the end of FY23.

In FY 22, 20 of our 33 offices offered co-sponsorship as part of their community sponsorship programs across APA and R&P programming. For APA specifically, 29 of our 33 offices who participated in APA offered community sponsorship, 19 of those 29 offered co-sponsorship opportunities. The one office that didn't engage in community sponsorship is new and is currently participating in technical assistance sessions with our community engagement team to launch community sponsorship programming inclusive of co-sponsorship.

- CWS Community Sponsorship program during APA included:
 - At the affiliate level, support teams and co-sponsorship activities are robust in some areas.
 - At the HQ level, CWS has launched two new pathways to sponsorship during APA:
 - CWS APA Community Partners: Groups who look on for co-sponsorship in order to welcome Afghan arrivals across the country. Groups committed to designation of all APA core services under the guidance of HQ staff.
 - Institutional Partnerships: Partnerships between CWS and national organizations to pass through responsibility to manage their community partners. The offer was born out of the emergency need to move families of safe havens in Phase 1. The two IP's that CWS primarily worked with were Samaritan's Purse and Islamic Relief.
 - CWS was also invested significantly in Technical Assistance for its offices/affiliates and has convened groups through the Refugee Welcome Collective (RWC) to promote learning across all R&P and their broader networks and it's Refugee Housing Solutions project to repair landlords and housing organizations to respond to the emergency housing needs of newcomers during this time.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

CWS's institutional commitment to community sponsorship has continued to grow under APA. CWS is finding to see it grow further in the coming year as it continues to expand community sponsorship programming with affiliates. The CS teams at CWS has grown well, both at the affiliate and HQ levels (ten two to eight staff people).

CWS HQ Community Partner and Institutional Partner programs provided us the opportunity to expand service delivery and provide support remotely for sponsors who delivered 100% of a newcomer's core services. CWS HQ staff provided weekly technical assistance calls and resources to support affiliates across the country. This enabled CWS to develop an extensive library of service delivery tools. These documents also contained insights regarding some of the challenges about making sponsorship succeed, including how to help sponsors engage with newcomers socially, how to manage language barriers, how to help set and manage boundaries effectively and beyond.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- Community Sponsorship expanded the geographic footprint of the APA program. It made remote placements possible in locations that were 100 miles from a local office.

- Community Sponsorship created champions in locations that may surprise people. It showed that we should not make assumptions about who can and cannot welcome newcomers effectively and encourage us to set aside assumptions about where newcomers can thrive and generate a sense of belonging, which are often based on politics.

- Community Sponsorship can generate more robust and long-term financial and in-kind resources for newcomers. In many instances, CWS witnessed the per capita support amplified by funders per month due to the fundraising of sponsors.

Sponsor Relations:

- Within community partners, it may be useful, expedient and cost-effective to work with those that can sponsor larger numbers of clients. One of CWS's IP partners, Islamic Relief, has been highly valuable because their CP's sponsored multiple families, and began operating as a quasi-affiliate.

- Other institutional partners, like Samaritan's Purse, proved valuable because they operated in more rural or more remote areas. Although these placements are often less effective, initial success stories show that remote placements can be very effective.

- When considering who can be a sponsor, it's important to do so through a lens of equity and inclusion. As a community, we should not be "picking" who can and cannot be sponsors. Recruitment events, a bipartisan issue with 2016, and it benefits us to be objective and open-minded about who can support newcomers's migration. With this in mind, our sponsor recruitment practices should encourage engaging community groups that are predominantly immigrant or Black (for example) alongside White churches and community groups.

Financing:

- The retail financing (from PRR and from Catalpa Fund) was crucial for enabling the growth of the community sponsorship work at the local level. It is unclear to what extent affiliates will find ongoing financing for this work. As far as CWS is aware, there has not been any teams downsizing to date, however, some states have expressed concerns about where community sponsorship funding will come in the future because it often relies so heavily on private share funding.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenges: In some states where community sponsors were ready and prepared to welcome newcomers, STCA's rejected placements due to general assistance constraints (e.g. hospital, schools, SNAP and other state benefits programs). This was a frustration at times because pipelines for community sponsorship were robust and tight.

Proposed Solution: The broader RA community may wish to engage with the USG about additional investment in public services support within communities that welcome newcomers. This helps to ensure that states and cities have the underlying capacity and support -- a foundation for the success of community sponsorship.

Challenges: Because the USG tightened up on many of their protocols and offered significant emergency funding, community sponsorship could be more readily utilized and needed did place people quickly. However, the fast pace also led to quality assurance issues because of the rapid placement of people and not everyone (sponsors, clients and agencies alike) had a good experience. Looking forward, there are several things that might help expedite placement without a reduction in the quality of care including:

- Proposed solutions:**
- Agencies need to fully document their approaches to community sponsorship, including how to source, vet, onboard and support community sponsors. If similar programing is needed in the future, we will be better equipped (or speed) program building.
 - Create a capacity building process to complement community consultations to assist communities who have the desire to welcome but may need some additional support in preparing community systems for newcomer arrivals. Having a process readily available can enable everyone to get check assumptions about where it is a good fit, which leaves room for partisan politics to dictate placements, rather than a lean identification of those who are able to help.
 - Develop a resource library for sponsors that contains materials that help service providers and stakeholders within the broader ecosystem understand the situation of newcomers (e.g. information/brief for police officers, hospitals, and schools on who is a refugee, tips for language barriers, and beyond).
 - While the emergency funding through APA was crucial, it's important that it is not pulled back now that APA is ending. This will shield in the way of continued development of community sponsorship programs, as CWS observes that community engagement teams are often the first to be cut, instead, funding for CS programming should be sustained in preparation for the next emergency, and one a tremendous value-added for many newcomers who continue to arrive through R&P now.

Success Story

CWS was engaging in remote placements through community partners. One STC in North Carolina wanted to see that Community Sponsorship would work in Boone, NC. They figured it wasn't the right environment for newcomers due to anti-immigrant sentiment.

But, CWS had a trusted community sponsor, a church, identified through Institutional Partner Samaritan's Purse, who was ready to welcome two Afghan families. After countless conversations, CWS convinced the STC to try. The families were excited so well that there are now another family overseas who have requested placement in Boone. Word of welcoming communities travels fast!

This example helps to highlight one of CWS's key lessons learnt through the APA CS work: anyone anywhere can welcome newcomers when they have the will, support, and information needed to succeed.

Islamic Relief (IR) also served as an Institutional Partner during the APA program. Through their organizational outreach, IR identified 3 sponsor partners in the Northern Virginia area that were interested in supporting Afghans. The Northern Virginia area was an over-saturated area for APA arrivals and the wait-list had grown into the hundreds. CWS collaborated with the leadership at the IR's office located in Northern VA and matched IR to 111 individuals/cases on the wait-list with sponsorship.

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

M. Daad Serveri

Description of CS Programming Under APA

IRIS, a CVS affiliate, currently has 38 co-sponsorship groups. Between September 2021 and September 2022, those groups supported 216 clients.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- Community sponsorship has enabled IRIS to get even better connected to many community resources including schools, hospitals, town halls and beyond.
- The quality of care and amount of financial resources going to newcomers with community sponsorship is vast and often long-standing in comparison to RFP clients. The care that can be provided from 20+ people is often extraordinary in comparison to what can be provided by a case manager (who often are supporting over 10 families and for a maximum of 90 days).
- In many cases, IRIS hears that newcomers stay connected to their sponsors even after they've become financially independent, a sign that there is social and personal value to the relationship beyond the support relationship.

Program Management:

- IRIS has found that partial program handover to sponsors (where two key services are handed over) does not relieve pressure on the case managers. For this reason, they only do full co-sponsorship.
- IRIS has found that CS is most effective for placements at least 40 minutes from the Hartford and New Haven communities for at least two important reasons: (1) When using CS within the areas where RFP was also happening, IRIS's two departments were essentially competing for housing with one another. This manifested tension between clients, sponsors and departments at IRIS, and (2) clients who want to stay in New Haven and Hartford are more likely to have personal connections nearby, which can make CS redundant and/or less important for the integration of the client.
- IRIS' process for deciding which clients are placed with Sponsor Coaches and which are placed with case managers is complex and not always straight forward. In general, clients who may need extra support (single mothers with kids for example) are often good candidates for community sponsorship.

Operations and Financing:

- One new issue is that some newcomers may misrepresent their connections within the US in order to secure a placement faster (e.g. because there are waitlists for those with ties in California, a newcomer may state they do not have ties and get resettled elsewhere with the intention to relocate to California). While understandable, this can frustrate sponsorship teams whose efforts to support integration in Connecticut were never needed. For the most part these aren't too much that can be done to prevent this, but it is a risk that IRIS has learned to manage through communication and careful review of case files.

Sponsor Relations:

- Sponsor relations starts long before the client arrives. Currently training happens between Sponsor Coaches and the sponsors via zoom, although IRIS is looking forward to having these trainings in person once again. IRIS observes that in-person trainings are more effective for digesting complex material.
- Sponsor Coaches communicate regularly with the sponsor heads. IRIS has learned that its important to call meetings as soon as a potential red flag is spotted.
- Outside of APA there were standard moments of engagement between Sponsor Coaches and sponsor teams (at the 10-, 45-, and 90-day mark). However, during APA the pace at which newcomers were being paired with sponsors made these standard check-ins difficult to stick with. Nevertheless, the program was executed well. This is likely due to quality of the training which prepares sponsors well. Furthermore, many of the sponsors that supported newcomers previously and were therefore less reliant on Sponsor Coaches.
- IRIS generally has high requirements for sponsors. For example, they need to raise at least \$15,000 (this is growing) and they needed at least 4 members of the group to have competency in the newcomer's preferred language. During APA these restrictions were lightened to some extent in order to manage the extreme need.

Case Management:

- IRIS also separates the sourcing of sponsors, with the management of sponsors. Different people on staff play these roles. This essentially creates a manageable sponsorship pipeline that has proved very effective at scaling up settling groups up for success.
- One signal that the program is working well is that many of the sponsorship teams will take on more than one family.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

Under APA, the sponsorship team changed dramatically. It grew into a full operation with multiple staff and a sounding system. Their general staff model relies on Director of Sponsorship programs who oversee the Program Manager and Sponsorship source staff. Community Sponsorship Groups Developors who cultivate new sponsor heads. The program manager oversees multiple Sponsorship Coaches.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenge: Covid restriction in general limited in person contacts with the grass root level community partners. e.g., IRIS had to conduct training of potential co-sponsor groups virtually which we think might not be as optimal as if the training is carried out in person.

Solution/idea: We are considering going back in person or at least hybrid

Challenge: Shall we add administrative documents that needed to be submitted to IRIS before the deadline?

Success Story

When asked about their favorite aspect of living in Connecticut, Laila and Moez Saidi said, "The sea." The couple escaped Afghanistan when the Taliban required control, and now live peacefully in Branford, steps away from the beach.

Although Laila and Moez enjoy the serenity of their new home, their journey to Connecticut was not easy. After fleeing Afghanistan, they migrated with 11 other families that are part of Turquoise Mountain, an artisan group, and lived in a refugee camp in Qatar. Laila describes the experience saying, "It was a big grudge. There were about 400 containers on top of each other. There were no windows. I was getting depressed." After nearly seven months in the camp, the couple finally arrived in the US, to a home with beautiful views and a flourishing garden.

Upon their arrival, they were greeted by an IRIS co-sponsorship group. This volunteer group, Branford Refugee Resettlement/Helping Families Settle (BRRHFS), was trained by IRIS for nearly a year to help the couple acclimate to life in Connecticut. BRRHFS welcomed the Saidis with a furnished home, fridge full of groceries, household items, and clothing.

The 50-sponsor team, led by Laura Nee, also helped. Laila and Moez got settled by familiarizing them with local bus routes, finding employment, enrolling them in English lessons, and scheduling healthcare appointments.

Herbiscene was especially vital as Laila and Moez just welcomed her, their first child, born a US citizen. Laila reflects on the newfound opportunities for her, "My daughter is in a safe country and will get an education. There are not any safe schools in Afghanistan, especially for girls. BRRHFS plans to open a college savings fund for Laila.

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program



Selamawit Woldemichael
USCRI – Arlington, VA

Description of CS Programming Under APA

- 1. At a national level, the adopted/proposed CS program models based on commitment levels, services, time, and financial commitments.
 - Level 1 – providing services that are not considered ‘core services,’ for example, donation collection and apartment stays.
 - Level 2 commitment – includes provide required furnishing and household supplies and support the family with a one month period of groceries
 - The financial commitment is \$1000-\$2500 and the time commitment is 6 months
 - Level 3 commitment – Providing the majority of core services
 - Financial commitment of \$2500-\$5000 and time commitment of 1 year.
- Affiliates are utilizing this model and blending it with their own versions after analyzing the capacity and expertise of individuals and community groups.
- Once the Co-Sponsors are recruited, the implementation is determined by the need/vulnerabilities of refugees.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

- How did APA change your agency’s approach to sponsorship programs at the national and local level? (Consider before and after APA)
 - The response of the community to helping Afghan Protocols included the interests in developing a more structured CS program
 - The need for dedicated CS coordinators arise at both national and local level
 - Creating a system or SOP for vetting Co-Sponsors
 - Our office immediately recognized that we could not serve many Afghan refugees in a short time. We choose to reach out to the community for support. The response was overwhelming.
 - CS with APA, communities were heavily involved. This often felt like it caused further issues for resettlement agencies. Sponsors were unaware of their responsibilities, felt it was their job to advocate for clients and push resettlement agencies into providing further services, additional funding etc.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

- What were some of the most important lessons learned through APA, community responsibility group/programs? (Lessons can pertain to programming, sponsor relations, financial programming, coordination/collaboration, partnerships and/or operations)
 - The power of Co-Sponsors to mobilize their families, friends, and the larger community - the co-sponsors play a vital role in supporting the outreach effort of agencies to reach a larger community.
 - The need for boundaries - **defining boundaries helps manage the expectations of both Co-Sponsors and refugees and prevent misunderstandings**
 - The need for thorough Co-Sponsorship training for staff, co-sponsors and refugees
 - Having systems in place for CS breakdown
 - The most important lesson learned is that awareness is essential. The community has to know that you exist, and they must know what you do. If you can provide opportunities to tell the refugees’ stories and connect them to individuals within the community, the likelihood of support is even greater.
 - CS allowed us to reach families to a broader geographical area, which was necessary due to housing availability and cost of living.
 - The need for implementing more training for groups. We are highlighting self-sufficiency and not doing too many tasks for refugees.

Lessons and reflections continued

- What are the main challenges you find? What solutions do you see and what barriers do you face in implementing those solutions?
 - Capacity to recruit, train and manage Co-Sponsors - there are time and financial strains
 - Staff turnover from both national and local levels created a lot of gaps in communication regarding what has been done and what hasn’t.
 - Lack of Co-Sponsor’ understanding of the responsibilities of resettlement agencies.
 - And one affiliate suggested based on experience that **advocacy shouldn’t be a role that Co-Sponsors should take on**
 - We found that volunteers end up having tough relationships with community partners. Volunteers tend to treat with a heavy hand with for example landlords and health care providers.
 - Managing expectations and consistent communication with volunteers was a challenge to manage
- Solution
 - Training, TA, and resources provided by national offices and RWIC for local offices and Co-Sponsors

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Success Story

- What is one success story you’d like to highlight?
 - One of our affiliates worked with a church group composed of 10-12 community members. The group supported an **Afghan family of 6** in many aspects of their resettlement activities: **medical appointments, housing support, school enrollsments for the children**, donations of bicycles, seeking and **securing employment** for the adults in the family, and saving the resources available in the community. This group also raised almost \$10,000 in cash to support the family.
 - As a result of this strong support, our affiliate was able to reunite this family in a further geographical area where housing is cheaper.
 - The affiliate is also joining such success stories to further develop a more robust community sponsorship model.
 - Some of our affiliates **structured their model based on tasks to engage community members based on their expertise: Welcome teams, transportation teams, mentors, employment teams**, and so on. These teams will be dedicated to families with a lesser need. For example, one of our affiliates has a Co-Sponsor group that focused on helping young men with **continuing education**.
 - **Six Afghan young men were matched with this group and four of them are now attending college and one has received a graduate assistant position at Missouri State University.**
 - Other affiliates are trying to connect refugees with **Co-Sponsors with similar national, cultural & language backgrounds**
 - One of our affiliates has an **Afghan support team assisting with employment and self-sufficiency. This team helped three Afghan refugees open a restaurant within a year of arriving in the US.** This is how the affiliate described the success. *Through our increased community awareness program and partnerships, the three Afghan refugees have been able to operate in an existing local restaurant which saves them a tremendous amount of overhead expense. They are serving Afghan cuisine and they received great press coverage and wonderful feedback and have been averaging 150-175 guests each night.*



Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri

Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

Lisa Lungren (USCCB), Lacy Stroessner (Catholic Charities)



Description of CS Programming Under APA

Between September 2021, and September 2022, 16 of 55 affiliates within the USCCB network used Support Teams and Co-Sponsor Groups to enhance services and ease burdens on teams. The USCCB network is finding their sponsors through churches, synagogues, mosques, ethnic community-based organizations, and civic groups such as the Rotary Club.

There is an intention to have affiliates with Support Team Programs move toward full co-sponsorship. USCCB aims to have 50-60% of the network embracing community co-sponsorship by the end of FY23.

Under USCCB's co-sponsorship model, affiliates ask groups to perform (on their own or in collaboration with agency) 5 or more of 15 allowable core services. Groups also provide in-kind and/or financial contributions. Many deliver "wrap-around" activities that facilitate integration including school tutoring, English conversation coaching, and financial literacy support.

Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri (CCCNMO) is an affiliate of USCCB and is currently using a full co-sponsorship model. During APA, CCCNMO has matched 150 clients with one of 10 co-sponsorship teams comprised of 30+ volunteers. During this time, CCCNMO matched clients with very large groups (entrepreneurs, or services clubs like Rotary), and these sponsors typically served more than one case at a time.

After gaining feedback from co-sponsors, confronting the challenges of large group dynamics, and struggling to meet the needs of clients, CCCNMO has redesigned its model. Now, they are recruiting smaller co-sponsor groups (6-8 people) and matching them with a single case/family. This way, roles are more clearly defined. Volunteers can focus on a specific case rather than spreading themselves thin trying to meet the needs of several cases at once.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

Prior to APA, USCCB offices relied on the strength of their traditional volunteer programs to support their resettlement work. Many were hesitant to take the leap when it came to relying on community groups to help with core services. The quantity and speed with which APA clients arrived created a situation where community sponsorship became a necessity. Before APA, 5 of USCCB's 55 affiliates had support teams. After APA there are now 18 implementing support teams or co-sponsorship groups and many more reaching out to ask USCCB for assistance with CS development for FY23.

CCCNMO launched their co-sponsorship program during APA. Prior to APA, CCCNMO was utilizing volunteers in a lot of core work, but not with the intention to hand over core services. Now, CCCNMO is one of the leaders of co-sponsorship within the USCCB network and has managed a successful pilot rollout during a period of substantial organizational growth.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- USCCB affiliates learned the value of and need for community groups to support newcomers, welcome not only through donations, but also active involvement with care and wrap around services. When Sponsorship is done well, it helps clients to be more successful. It also helps refugees and resettlement agencies with the community.
- The true benefit of CS is that it places the need/Missouri it is possible to have 100+ active members of a sponsorship network that are now champions for refugee populations. These sponsors have gained personal experiences that impact their viewpoint, leading to more accepting communities overall. Whereas CCCNMO used to be 11 staff people working in an effort to generate a welcoming environment, now there is an entire community working to create a more beautiful Missouri for all.
- CCCNMO has found that community sponsors really get things done! From public benefits to housing to ad hoc solutions, community sponsors move fast and definitively in support of their clients.
- Case Managers at CCCNMO have seen that CS can help reduce workload issues for their teams, assuming that there is meaningful upfront investment.

Program Management:

- USCCB realized that affiliates needed greater connection to one another to exchange best practices, collectively resolve shared challenges, and to gain strength and support among peers. USCCB now runs an internal monthly Community of Practice directed at community sponsor coordinators.
- USCCB also learned to value the value that community sponsorship plays in its resettlement programs. USCCB embedded a permanent CS section in its weekly resettlement bulletin and its online resource platform for affiliates. It also is sharing success stories with the broader community through social media outlets. The focus for USCCB going forward is expanding its technical assistance offering by creating more regular opportunities for personalized technical assistance to see more affiliates embrace community sponsorship.
- CCCNMO learned that the larger sponsorship groups (some had 40+ members) are difficult to manage. Since then, CCCNMO has launched several new sponsorship teams that are smaller (6-8 people) who manage only one client or family at a time. This gave all members of the group something to do. The only possible downside (which has yet to play out) is that smaller groups may find it harder to fundraise.
- CCCNMO also learned that they should not require sponsors to be a legal entity. Once they remove this as a requirement and adjusted their onboarding and agreements, more groups came forward that were better suited to manage co-sponsorship responsibilities. That said, CCCNMO has chosen not to set up together sponsorship teams. It's important that the sponsor is already known one another and have proven they can operate effectively together.

Sponsor Relations:

- USCCB and CCCNMO have found that one key to successful management of sponsors is excellent and clear parameters around communication. It's important to have one full time point person that serves as a liaison between staff and the sponsor team through which all communication flows. That communication should be ongoing. CCCNMO currently provides monthly calls with sponsors, in-person training events, and opportunities for sponsors to bounce ideas off one another.

Sponsor Relations Continued:

- CCCNMO runs a monthly newsletter called Sponsorship Scoop that shares success stories, resources, opportunities (like RVOCs, lunch and learn calls). This is one way to provide a feeling amongst sponsors that they are being supported even without a 1:1 touch point.
- USCCB and CCCNMO have found it is very important to clarify the roles and responsibilities between the resettlement agency, the sponsor, and the client at the outset of a sponsor relationship and be prepared to reiterate that message often. CCCNMO has discovered that when there isn't daily on roles and responsibilities, it's easy for sponsors to assume that the resettlement agency has a larger ongoing role than it does, or that the agency has dropped 100% of the responsibility to the CS.
- Appropriate ongoing training enables sponsor success. In addition to training related to the core services, USCCB and CCCNMO have seen the need for ongoing support (or topics like cultural communication, the importance of promoting self-sufficiency (and what that looks like), and what it means to provide services in a manner that acknowledges newcomers' strength and resilience.

Operations and Financing:

- It would be impossible to run CS programming without dedicated staff at both affiliate and RA levels to manage the program. It is critical to continue investing in CS beyond APA in order to witness the many benefits of CS come to fruition and grow.
- Funding for positions at the HQ level is enabling USCCB to provide greater support to affiliates as they develop CS programming. A new staffer joining the team soon will be available for 15+ time with affiliates to provide technical assistance and to develop leadership (CS ambassadors) at the affiliate level that can help USCCB encourage even more members of its network to embrace co-sponsorship.
- At CCCNMO, the sponsorship team has realized that case managers (CMs) need training before clients are matched with sponsors. Many CMs have not held public-facing positions and may not possess the kind of communication necessary to keep sponsors engaged and successful. Sponsors often have high expectations of the support they'll receive from the agency. CCCNMO is providing training through one-on-one conversations between the sponsorship lead and CMs. These conversations (soon to be more formalized) help to foster a greater appreciation for and understanding of volunteer management.
- CCCNMO requires its volunteers to track their engagements through a tool called CERVIS. This is currently onerous, and accountability is difficult. Ideally, there would be a less complex way to collect the data and track in-hand contributions including time.

Coordination and Partnership Development:

- USCCB continued with RMC to offer right of the affiliate's degree guidance on the development of CS programming. Through this is ongoing, it's clear that sharing wisdom across the RA's and through initiatives with RMC will help encourage CS learning and the development of high-quality CS programming across the country.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

- Challenge: Tilly:** CCCNMO was unable to provide regular communication with sponsors (the program was really being run by a volunteer) and some sponsors decided to step down, essentially handing the responsibility for core services back to a case manager. This created frustration amongst case managers, who were swamped. CCCNMO welcomed 300 clients in just 90 days, and community sponsorship became a solution to an urgent crisis.
- Solution:** Generating buy-in amongst case managers after a rocky start has required a slow and steady investment of energy by sponsorship staff, and a willingness to rethink the administration of the program. CCCNMO achieved this with careful planning and implementation. Key changes include a) adding significantly more structure to the program in terms of training, onboarding and ongoing sponsor support (not done by the case manager); b) embedding the use of formal communication channels; and c) hiring a sponsorship lead.

- Challenge:** There is an interest in developing excellent mechanisms for assessing the impact of the CS model. This would include the development of a tool and process to measure client integration and collect client feedback for those matched with a CS. However, there are challenges to doing both things right and well. Integration measurement is a complex research topic requiring specialized support. Client feedback is difficult to track due to low levels of literacy (in clients' first languages), as well as cultural preferences for direct vs. indirect communication.
- Proposed solutions:** Unsurprisingly, this might be an interesting point of discussion.

- Challenge:** Many affiliates received an overwhelming response from the community in supporting Afghan arrivals, along with a desire to serve as community sponsors. Now that agencies would like to leverage sponsorship for RRA clients, the level of interest on behalf of the community in many circumstances has declined.
- Proposed Solutions:** Accept invitations from the community to speak about Afghan evacuees and leverage the opportunity to educate about resettlement of formerly displaced families from other countries of origin. For faith-based groups, provide reminders of the sanctity and dignity of all newcomers. Investigate why a group is tied to working with Afghanian households, highlight any similarities there may be between Afghan evacuees and other populations fleeing their homeland.

Success Story

A 14-person family arrived in Mid-Missouri in September of 2021 and was matched with a co-sponsorship group. Due to occupancy limits, the sponsors had a very difficult time finding housing. They even sat down with every realtor in the area. Unfortunately, none was willing to support a family without credit history.

But the sponsors were diligent. They approached Habitat for Humanity who agreed to build the family a home. The PA and one of the adult sons is participating in the construction.

The family is open about being incredibly embraced by the community and not wanting to live anywhere else. This kind of deep and above-and-beyond support would never have been possible without the dedication of community sponsors.



Reflections from a Year of Welcome through the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program

Hannah Scully



Description of CS Programming Under APA

Program development and expansion was the focus of CS Programming for IRC under APA. Prior to APA, three offices were participating in Community Sponsorship – today, there are 21. Between September 2021 and September 2022, IRC offices matched 1st clients with co-sponsors across 21 offices. Some of these offices are also doing Support Teams.

In addition to Co-Sponsorship, 80 clients were sponsored through the Community Partners (Remote Placement) Program and 45 clients were supported through Sponsor Circles.

Important Lessons Learned Through APA

Regarding the Value of Community Sponsorship:

- Community Sponsorship offers resettlement agencies the ability to build internal capacity, cast a wider net for community resources, and the opportunity for newcomers to live and work in communities with lower cost of living.

Program Management:

- Universities are great partners for Co-Sponsorship because they come with a lot of built-in support for newcomers. IRC offices established partnerships with Arizona State University, Washington State University, University of Hawaii, and Vassar College, who were all willing to sponsor newcomers with core services plus more.

Sponsor Relations:

- IRC has worked hard to stress the importance of clear communication between the resettlement agency and co-sponsor group throughout the sponsorship period. Early on, it is crucial to establish clear points of contact and weekly check-ins. These weekly check-ins are an opportunity to address and troubleshoot challenges, provide technical assistance, and collect information needed for case file documentation.

Operations and Financing:

- The best model for managing CS that IRC has seen across affiliates is to have two people managing the team. A volunteer recruiter on the resource development team and a community sponsorship coordinator (to support the sponsor teams once they are brought on).

- Current monitoring and evaluation efforts include conducting a phone interview with clients at the 3-month and 6-month mark to gauge how the sponsorship is going. A member of the M&E team also gathers data from co-sponsors about the sponsorship experience through a baseline, 3-month, and 6-month survey.

Partnership and Coordination:

- IRC has benefited from hearing from the work of peer organizations and has deeply appreciated the resources that are emerging from established processes. Because CS has been a new program at IRC, being able to lean on partnerships for guidance was crucial for program success.

Main Challenges & Possible Solutions

Challenge: Volunteer recruitment has been a challenge as excitement has waned from APA, and many groups are only interested in sponsoring Ukrainians or Afghans.

Proposed Solution: IRC engages in intentional, pro-active outreach and community mapping to identify community groups within the 100-mile radius of a local office. As outreach is done, it is essential to educate community members on the resettlement journey and about the many different countries where a client can come from to increase awareness for other populations.

Challenge: Program buy-in amongst staff has been a significant challenge. During the height of APA, staff were more willing to embrace CS programs because the need was so great. Now that things are calming down a bit, staff are expressing interest in moving back to case managers for the delivery of all case services.

Proposed Solution: IRC is working to share the utility and value of the CS programs, both by sharing client success stories, showing the profound impact on the community, and demonstrating the increased capacity for the office. IRC is also focusing on bridging the gap between resettlement and development teams in local offices as involving both teams in program design and build-out is crucial for success.

Challenge: IRC has noted the importance of working with sponsors who will not promote a sense of dependency and “doing for.” Amongst sponsor teams who carry unchecked bias and privilege, this has proved difficult.

Proposed solutions: One solution to this is diversifying the sponsor pool to include people who may have a more organic understanding of the principals of DEI (due to their own lived experiences in America as a person of color, and/or living in poverty. People with such experiences may have a better understanding of the benefit systems in America which may position them to offer more apt advice without relying on the EA for answers.

Success Story

IRC Phoenix partnered with Arizona State University who co-sponsored 67 Afghan women and supported them upon their arrival into the US. This included full tuition, housing, medical care, community and beyond. IRC sees universities as ideal welcoming partners and hopes to develop new partnerships with them in the coming years.

Through Community Sponsorship, local offices have also been able to expand their reach and exposure, and therefore expand the scope of advocacy within different states. In Virginia, over 60 people were resettled for the Institute outside of Charlottesville into new, more affordable communities. With this expansion, families were able to access affordable housing and gain access to a large network of new community resources.

Sponsor teams in these new communities were also interested in supporting advocacy efforts relevant to the newcomers. For example, some sponsor teams advocated in support of the Afghan Adjustment Act by writing letters to their senators and creating petitions. In the example, Community Sponsorship turned communities who were otherwise unfamiliar with situations of forced displacement into advocates for their new neighbors.

How APA Changed Community Sponsorship

Prior to APA, IRC had 3 offices doing Community Sponsorship and now they have 21. This has been a period of training and growing for IRC as they embrace Community Sponsorship. This rapid expansion was made possible by 3 factors:

- APA funds, and now Preferred Community funds, made it possible to fund Community Sponsorship staff (and community engagement more generally). It is crucial that this funding continues and/or other funding sources be identified.
- Program buy-in: Local staff were willing to embrace the concept of CS because of the unprecedented level of need.
- APA generated awareness within the general public regarding the experiences of forcibly displaced people, as communities mobilized. Community Sponsorship opportunities became a way to put this energy to use. This moment also increased the visibility of IRC within the communities they work which may make it easier to recruit volunteers in the future.

