



*Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education*

# Community and Healthcare Transformation Project

## ***Report on Refugee and Immigrant Challenges***

Project FINE's Community and Healthcare Transformation project began in 2017 with a goal of engaging refugees and immigrants to identify health inequities; share information on challenges that prevent positive health outcomes; and work together with stakeholders and community members to pursue systems, policies and practices that promote equity.

The first phase of the project focused on deeply listening to the experiences of refugees and immigrants in our area. To accomplish this, Project FINE conducted focus groups and individual interviews with 93 individuals from 23 countries. All of the refugees and immigrants we talked with were grateful to be living in the United States and they appreciate many things about this country and our community. However, they still face many challenges and barriers that prevent them from living a full and healthy life. The five most common challenges from the focus groups interviews are outlined on the following pages.

### ***About Project FINE:***

Project FINE is a nonprofit organization based in Winona, MN focused on integrating newcomers into our local community. Our mission is to strengthen and enrich our community by facilitating the integration of people who are ethnically diverse. We provide culturally and linguistically appropriate educational programming, and help newcomers access existing services in our region. Since 1990, we have served as a connection point for refugees and immigrants, helping build contributing individuals, healthy families and a more respectful community.

The Community and Healthcare Transformation Project is a three-year project that began in 2017. It is funded by the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.

If you'd like to know more, please contact:



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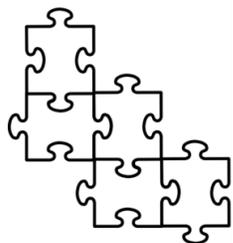
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## Key findings from listening sessions with refugees and immigrants in Winona County:



### ***Community connections are difficult to create, but are crucial for health and happiness.***

Most refugees and immigrants we spoke with stated that they either don't feel connected at all or that they only feel connected to people from the same cultural background. Many are unaware of what is happening in the larger community and expressed feelings of loneliness, sadness or isolation. They also feel it would be almost impossible to cultivate the depth of connections they had back in their home country.

***"I don't think we are very well connected to the larger community. We really don't know what is going on around us."***



### ***Lack of legal status creates challenges, limits contributions, and leads to fear and isolation.***

Difficulties related to immigration status were mentioned as a challenge for many refugees and immigrants. Lack of pathways to legal status is a major barrier, and for those without citizenship or permanent residency, fear is a part of life. Many also spoke of the potential community benefits of pathways to legal status by being able to purchase homes or businesses, and increasing availability of skilled workers.

***"If you go out one day, you just don't know if you will be coming back or if you'll see your kids again."***



### ***Racism on community and national levels limits opportunities and leads to fear and inequity.***

Racism was a topic of discussion in every focus group and interview conducted, and several examples of racism in our community were shared. Instances were noted in interactions with other residents, law enforcement, businesses, service providers, schools and workplaces. Many also expressed fear and concern of growing anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiment on a national level; and racist behavior was described as widespread, current and increasing.

***"Before if someone was racist they were able to control it but now people have the courage to just let it out."***



### ***Basic needs must be met for families to live a full and healthy life.***

Access to basic needs is also a challenge for refugees and immigrants. In the area of health care, rising costs, lack of access to insurance, and limited availability of specialists were mentioned often. They also shared that it is very hard to find safe and affordable housing, even for those who qualify for section 8 or other public housing. Other challenges included lack of access to transportation and difficulties navigating the complex systems and policies of service providers.

***"For me the hardest thing is not knowing the system."***



### ***Limited access to employment and educational opportunities can limit potential.***

Most of the refugees and immigrants we spoke with are employed, but wages are often not enough to make ends meet. Previous education or experience gained outside of the US is often not recognized, leading to lower paying jobs and limited opportunities for advancement. Many parents also shared that they would like more afterschool activities, as want their children to be involved.

***"I wish people had the opportunity to have better jobs. Sometimes you're not able to save money because you live paycheck to paycheck."***