

“Best Practices in Serving LGBT Refugees”

ORR webinar – Transcript

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Operator: Please stand by. Hello. Please welcome to our webinar called Best Practices in Serving LGBT Refugees. This webinar is sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Today’s conference is being recorded.

At this time I would like to turn the conference over to Ms. Amy. Please go ahead ma’am.

Amy: Well thank you, and welcome everyone to this webinar. This webinar is part of the Bridges for Refugees and Asylees project that’s funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. And this particular Technical Assistance Initiative is supported by ICF International. I’ll be your facilitator. And I want to let you know who’s going to be talking with you today. We’ve got some fabulous presenters. First we have Christine Lemonda. And Christine is the Deputy Director for Northern California of the International Rescue Committee, IRC. She’s based in Oakland. And she’s also the LGBT Liaison for IRC. Sarah Ivory is a Regional Director for U.S. Programs with Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program. And Sarah is hailing from New York City right now. Carol Palecki’s going to join us and talk about her work. She’s the coordinator of the LGBT Program, Refugee Program at Jewish Family and Children’s Services, JFCS Eastbay, California. And Juliane Ramic, she is the Senior Director of Refugee and Community Integration for the Nationalities Service Center of Philadelphia.

So we’ve got a really cool webinar planned for you. And essentially we’re going to be discussing resettling refugees, LGBT refugees who are going to have a national perspective for you. We’re going to talk about it from a regional perspective. And then we’re going to give you some local perspective.

And we’d really love for you to hop in. We’re going to tell you how to do that in a second – so you can share your best practices, or your challenges, or questions with these presenters about how you might be able to achieve some more great work with LGBT refugees in the state. So this is how you can ask questions. I’m going to give it to Heidi. Heidi is with IRC. Can you let us know?

Heidi: Hi Amy. And actually I’m with ICF, just to clarify. So this is pretty straightforward. The way to ask a question throughout the webinar is going to be done online and it’s through the Q&A button that you’ll see at the top of your screen. So you just go in there, type it in and please feel free to start typing questions throughout the webinar so that they get in the queue. You don’t have to wait until we start the Q&A section. And that’s pretty much it, so back to you Amy.

Amy: Okay, great. So our first presenter is Christine. And Christine is going to give us a national perspective about resettling LGBTQ refugees and why the IRC jumped in, you know, full-fledged into the effort. Again, if questions come up for you all, feel free to type away in your Q&A box and after all the presenters speak we’ll open it up for your questions. Okay Christine.

Christine: Hi Amy. Thank you for the introduction. Can everyone hear me okay?

Amy: You sound great.

Christine: Perfect. So it’s an honor to be here today on behalf of the International Rescue Committee to talk about our commitment to serving LGBT refugees; and to be on this forum with my colleagues from around the nation. I’ll start by just elaborating a bit about the need. And why we’re focused on this topic today. So across the globe a significant number of individuals are fleeing persecution based off their sexual orientation and gender identity. Notable places where these human rights violations take place include Uganda and various countries in the Middle East. In addition to all of the typical challenges that refugees face during their resettlement process—learning

English, adjusting to a new culture—LGBT refugees face additional challenges and have unique concerns and vulnerabilities during their resettlement process.

It's notable to talk about the fact that LGBT refugees often face persecution and violence from folks that are close to home, maybe within their own families or their own ethnic communities. When LGBT refugees are resettled, this can add additional challenges. And the fact that it's not a best practice to necessarily place an LGBT refugee amongst their own ethnic community. This can often lead to social isolation for these individuals. And an area that is very challenging is finding appropriate housing for LGBT refugees; which will be discussed later in this webinar.

So I want to talk a little bit about what IRC has done to support this community. Though we have been involved in working with LGBT refugees for many years, it was just in early 2015 that we took a much more engaged and active approach. And the LGBT liaison's position; which I hold, was created. The intention of this position was really to represent IRC on a national level. To be at the table so to speak when working with ORR, with PRM, with the other resettlement agencies and groups like the LGBT Caucus of the Refugee Congress. Another intention of this position was to assist IRC advocacy staff by informing agendas based off what's happening in the field and what we're hearing from clients. And thirdly, this position is a dedicated point of contact within our network. I'm working to advance in-house resources and programming and to inform best practices across the country.

Perfect, there's my second slide. And I want to talk a little bit about how we've been engaging on a national level; notably the support that we're offering to the LGBT Caucus of the Refugee Congress. And for those who might not be familiar with this group, it's a group of LGBT refugees and asylees with delegates from across the country that are advocating and raising a voice for this population in meaningful and productive ways. So in June in honor of World Refugee Day IRC participated amongst other groups including ORR, UNHCR, and Human Rights Campaign in a World Refugee Day event in Washington, D.C. to raise the profile of LGBT refugees. We've also been working with the caucus to help develop a survey with the intention to administer it to LGBT refugees already resettled to learn more about their experiences both pre and post arrival to help us identify areas for improvement in serving this population.

A final area of collaboration with the caucus is around the Community Education and Awareness Program; which is an initiative to bridge resettlement agencies and LGBT organizations working to establish collaborations and more resources for LGBT refugees. This initiative will be launching in Miami, San Diego, and Houston this fall. On top of working with the caucus IRC truly believes that resettlement agencies should take a collective approach to serving LGBT refugees; which is why we collaborate with many of our partners on the phone today, HIAS, CWS, USCRI in doing this work. And a final point about our national efforts is to just mention the work of Anna Greene, the Director of Policy and Advocacy at IRC who's doing awareness and advocacy for LGBT refugees at both the state and federal level.

I'd like to shift gears and talk a little bit about what we're doing within our network. We currently have 25 locations across the U.S. which you can see. I believe 22 at the time that this was printed. We now have new locations launching in Tallahassee as well as in Charlottesville, excuse me, and the work that we're doing across our network.

So early in the start of the LGBT position, I administered a survey across the 22 offices at that time to get a sense of what people were doing. Were they seeing LGBT clients? What types of best practices had they developed? What areas are missing that we need to focus more on? And I'll just share a brief bit about the findings that we found most common in the results.

Overarching was the need for improvement in housing. We also realized that we don't have a formal tracking mechanism within our system to really identify how many LGBT refugees we are working with. And we thought that this was important in terms of looking for funding, being able to, you know, really talk about this group more substantially. We identified that we do provide training opportunities, but they're not necessarily consistent in

reaching all necessary staff; and that there's a great need to establish local connections with local LGBT organizations. Another exciting thing about this survey is that HIAS and CWS have also administered similar surveys and we're excited to see how we can compare findings and engage more nationally with the results from these studies.

Other efforts that have taken place across the network include sharing at best practices. I had the opportunity to present at International Refugee Committee's Annual Case Management Conference early this year. And really talk with management-level staff about the importance of making sure there's sensitivity training and best practices happening throughout the network. In a community of practice call; which is an opportunity for direct service providers across our 25 offices to come together I facilitated a workshop about the best approaches to work with LGBT refugees as a case manager.

I'd like to just highlight a few specific examples of happenings across our network. Here in Oakland we have a Center for Well Being where we provide mental health services with a licensed clinician and social worker. And in this year we've had the opportunity to serve more than 16 LGBT individuals and couples in one-to-one or couples counseling. I know my colleague Carol is on the phone and we've been fortunate to have a nice, collaborative approach. And also be able to provide mental health services to the LGBT refugees in need that are being resettled by the local HIAS affiliate as well. In the Phoenix IRC there was a collaborative training earlier in the summer between various churches, LGBT organizations, and the resettlement agency to start building that collaborative network and identifying resources for clients. And I'll also mention that our Seattle office had the opportunity to secure some local funding from a Pride Foundation, allowing them to offer more support to the LGBT community.

So I'll just kind of finish up by talking about what else is in the works and what we are hoping to kind of roll out in the future here at IRC. One of the most important things, excuse me I'm just adjusting my slides, is addressing what we found in the survey. So in terms of staff training, we're thinking about ways to integrate that so it's annual and reaching everyone. So how to integrate that into part of our onboarding for all new hires; and then make sure that it's part of, what we call the IRC way, our annual training. So those initiatives are underway.

We're also developing a formalized tracking system, so working within the capacity of our database to be able to enter that information in a confidential way. And also how to implement that; working with direct service staff from across the network to find the most sensitive and appropriate ways to capture that information from clients. Many times LGBT identity is not on the bio data that's received pre-arrival. Or a client isn't necessarily ready to disclose as soon as they arrive. But we're just trying to think about all the different times and places we can capture that information.

We're also looking into expanding our financial options to really focus on the LGBT population; which includes looking after more private funding from local foundations as well as integrated into our other core funding resources.

We've established a working group with representation from the field, from headquarters, from LGBT clients and it's a focus-topic group. So the first initiative was about the formal tracking system that I spoke about and others are yet to come.

We're also working on mainstreaming services and looking at how we can integrate LGBT content into our core programs and curriculum. This includes our cultural orientation, our English language classes and our job-readiness training. Likewise we're working on creating welcoming spaces. And a great amount of ideas came out of the survey about how to do this. It includes hanging rainbow flags and photos of LGBT refugees and offices. It includes having translated materials from local LGBT organizations available within the office. As I mentioned earlier, we're happy to participate with the LGBT Caucus of the Refugee Congress in the Community Education and Awareness Program and we're looking forward to getting out to San Diego and Miami to start networking there.

And the final point I'll mention is an upcoming training that I'll be facilitating in December at the CalWORKs and Refugee Programs Bureau Academy where I'll be talking about understanding the resettlement experiences of LGBT refugees.

So I want to thank you for your time and your joint commitment to serving LGBT refugees.

Amy: Thank you so much Christine. Next we have Sarah, who's the Regional Director for U.S. Programs with Church World Service with their Immigration and Refugee Program. Sarah.

Sarah: Great. Thank you so much. As the Regional Director of U.S. Programs we're working with a number of sites across our network and certainly with our affiliates at a further network. And we've received a lot of feedback already on their experiences in receiving and resettling LGBT refugees; what patterns they're seeing in out-migration and what concerns incoming clients are bringing to our offices. It's brought about some questions that we've been talking about within our network on regional considerations both for placement as well as on the ground for offices to be prepared for as they're receiving new clients.

There are kind of three aspects I'd like to talk about related to that. One is the pre-departure perceptions of refugees; how they perceive safety in their locations where they're coming. The next is the legal protections that provide safety in the places where they're going to. And the last is thinking about city size and location, the types of places they're going and the variety of housing options that are available.

So I'm going to go ahead and start with pre-departure perceptions. You know, of course we're living in a different era now and refugees, like everyone else, often have access to the internet and access to news and information about the places where they're going. And one of the things we've heard from the field is that, you know, a lot of refugees are doing research before they get on the plane and forming ideas about the places where they are going to. If they're doing a Google search for a certain location what they come up with are news articles or posts related to potentially dangerous situations. That's certainly going to have a tremendous impact on their feelings of relative security and potential risks in those locations. So although we can certainly do our best to make sure that all of our offices are welcoming spaces for refugees, that they are working hard to develop positive relationships in their communities, if before a refugee even arrives their perception of that location is tainted by what they've learned, that can really impact their sense of fear and insecurity in their new homes. And I think that's something that we do need to consider carefully. We have seen in locations where people have arrived and expressed an interest in out-migrating, not because of an experience they've had there but because of their perception of what it would be like to be an LGBT person in the South or what it is like to be a rural area. Or they may have just seen a specific news article that created that sense of fear. And I think it's important that we acknowledge that that fear is very real.

Another aspect that's important to look at regionally are the legal protections that are in place in those places. The map we have up here is one looking at laws related to hate crimes and the different levels of protections that exist. But hate crimes are not the only thing that we should be concerned with. There are a number of maps that track discrimination laws and there's a Website LGBTmaps.org where you can kind of go through looking at the employment discrimination laws that protect LGBT people; housing, public accommodations. And looking at the places where LGBTs - individuals have the greatest level of protection. Although we know that in many places where those laws are not in place there are other mechanisms there. I think it's an important thing to be able to talk with our clients about, to share that information, to add a sense of security and on the ground actual protection as well.

And then the third aspect I wanted to touch on is the city size and housing options where we're placing people. One of the things we've heard from refugees is the feeling of wanting to blend in within any given environment. People - LGBT and non-LGBT refugees often don't want to feel that they don't fit in. None of us want to feel that we don't fit in in a certain place. And I think the types of locations where people are going can impact that.

Certainly if you're in a rural environment with fairly low diversity you're likely to stand out more than if you're in a more urban area. I think another aspect to take into consideration is whether newly arrived refugees in that location live in clustered locations or if they're more widely dispersed. As we know the fear that refugees have can be also within their own communities for very legitimate reasons. They may be at risk of living in clusters of people from their home country or from regional areas. At the same time what we've heard from refugees is they also don't want to be isolated. So if they're being placed in a community where all newly arrived refugees live in one of three apartment complexes and they're living on the other side of town that also adds to a feeling of isolation that we don't want to further impact their resettlement experience. They may be better off in places where there are more housing options or where they're able to feel that they're a part of a community without feeling at risk. And I think we often need to be looking at what resources those organizations have and not just are there LGBT organizations there, but do those organizations have immigrant membership, indoor leadership.

One of the early findings from some of the surveys that we've been doing is that just having the connections to other organizations hasn't actually resulted in meaningful connections for the refugee when they arrive. Particularly in incidences where those LGBT organizations really do not have immigrant membership or experience working with immigrant communities. They may not have experience working across language barriers or sensitivity to issues that refugees may face that are different from the mainstream population. So that certainly indicates an opportunity to view additional community education and awareness in working with those groups. And some of the trainings that are planned coming up in Miami and Houston and in-house formally I believe are really aimed at continuing to improve the capacity of those existing organizations.

And I think there are a number of other things that I'll be interested to hear what our group has to say during the question-and-answer, but I think that these are some of the things that we've heard come out in places where refugees have said, you know, we feel safe with you as an organization but we just don't think this is the type of place that's good for us. And they've moved on. And certainly we support everyone's freedom of movement to go to the places where they feel most comfortable. But to the extent that we can help mitigate that and help make people feel safe in their first point, the first place that they come certainly I know that's something we're all working toward.

So I think the conclusion from is that the perception of insecurity can really have a similar impact on an individual as the reality of insecurity. Fear is a very real emotion and if that's something that's really holding someone back that may not be the best location for them. A State's commitment to equal treatment and protection are important indicators of security for people on the ground, and is something that I think we should all be taking seriously and certainly advocating for at State levels in those places where discrimination protections are not at the level that they need to be.

And lastly that every location has its own opportunities and challenges to think through; I know that across our network everyone has been working with these. But, when we take it back and we think about what regions or parts of the country are best suited for new arrivals who have self-identified—where we do have opportunities to choose carefully where we're placing them.

That's all I have on this and I look forward to continuing the discussion and hearing from our presenters next on their local programs.

Amy: Thank you Sarah. Next we'll have two local perspectives. This is Carol Palecki; she's the Coordinator of the LGBT Refugee Program at Jewish Family and Children's Services in East Bay, California. Thanks Carol.

Carol: Hello everyone. Can you hear me okay.

Amy: We can.

Carol: Okay. Yes, our agency is an affiliate with HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. We're a resettlement organization. Three years ago we started this program and I've been the Coordinator ever since. The program is funded in part by a Special Populations grant from ORR.

Another affiliate of HIAS in New York had a similar grant primarily to help asylees, those people that have been granted asylum because they found it was just too expensive to resettle refugees. So they only ended up resettling one refugee in New York.

We have offices in Berkley and Walnut Creek and we have placed our LGBT refugees around the Bay area in different locals depending on where we can find housing. Just a little bit about our program: to date we've resettled 17 refugees from Africa and the Middle East. And I have been case manager for each of those individuals except one.

So I feel like I've been lucky enough to work with 17 wonderful individuals and learned a little bit about their stories. And found many differences as well as similarities. All of the refugees who've been here more than eight months have found work and are relatively self-sufficient. We try to continue to help them as much as we can indefinitely, but definitely for the first year. We give them a lot of case management, individual help and help with housing and volunteer groups which I'll talk about next.

So far in addition to the refugees we've also helped 22 people who have been granted asylum. Most of those people are from Latin America. We haven't given them the same level of assistance that we have our refugee clients where we've really done everything for our refugee clients from meeting them at the airport to making, you know, just absolutely making sure that they have safe accommodations and training and work. But with those who have been granted asylum, a lot of them already are on their feet by the time they have been granted asylum, because the process takes a while. So usually for them we just provide a few referrals.

So for housing strategies we've used a hosted-housing model. And that means that we ask local LGBT community members and also Bay community members to provide a room in their house. We say for two to eight months for \$200 to \$400. So it's a very limited amount of money, but we make appeals to them since we are a Jewish organization - to local synagogues. We've also worked really very closely with Unitarian Church and they have developed their own organization that does amazing outreach for housing and provides volunteer groups for our clients. We've worked really closely with them. Also there's just lots of different LGBT groups and lots of different gay-friendly faith-based organizations. Our executive director has spoken in synagogues. I have spoken in churches, making appeals for our refugees. It's a time and labor intensive process; it's a hard sell. But somehow we have managed to get all our refugees to-date housed for at least the first year. And then after that most of them were able to find housing for themselves.

And one thing we do is we provide lots of ongoing support for housing hosts. A lot of housing hosts understandably are reluctant to have a refugee stay in their home. They say, "Well what do we know about this person?" We try to assure them that they've had lots of security checks and we try to also tell them some of the problems that might come up. You know, of course a lot of our clients have had severe trauma. And, you know, people are often wanting or maybe they're thinking about this opportunity as it would be to host an exchange student. And we really have to disabuse them of that notion from the onset. And just say we don't know but there's a good chance that this individual is going to come with some trauma and maybe will want to spend time alone. Maybe they won't always want to be social or be the way an exchange student might be. So we have to warn our housing hosts just so we can make sure that they don't get in a situation they really don't want to be in. On the other hand it's such a tough sell we don't want to over-warn them. So we try to make a balance.

But I meet individually with each housing host. And when the refugee comes I bring them over and I will go over to the house several times in the first few months just to make sure things are okay. And I have regular communication with the housing host. And I think that is one thing that has really helped the situation. But it's a

very hard sell. And I'm always relieved when we get a house that works and that is a good fit. So the way, as I mentioned, we make a lot of housing appeals; sometimes in person, sometimes by email through LGBT organizations in the area, through faith-based communities, through our own local networks.

And we've started using Space Box, Twitter and NEXTOR to make more appeals. Also on our JSCS East Bay Website there is a page about the LGBT refugee program which has a link to information about hosting a refugee, so we try to really make sure that potential housing hosts know what is involved. We try to spell it out as much as we can.

If we know that a specific refugee is going to arrive we'll make the appeal a bit more targeted; this is a 22 year old man from Burundi and he loves to play the piano. He has worked as this, this, and this. We never say anything that would violate the person's confidentiality, but we have found that just giving a little bit of personal information makes the housing host more comfortable.

We have had situations where it really did not work out and we had to find another situation. One thing we've been very lucky recently to partner with a Franciscan Monastery who agreed to house any of the refugees in an emergency. So they are welcome to stay there for several weeks or a month and that's a great back-up to have. So if there is ever a problem we can at least make sure that they can stay there. And at this point we also have a lot of housing hosts who are willing to have someone temporarily in an emergency.

Okay, so the challenge I've talked about is how difficult it is to find housing. There is a big housing shortage in this area, prices have really skyrocketed and it takes an enormous amount of staff time to find housing to do these appeals. Sometimes the hosts are just disappointed that the refugee doesn't want to hang out with them more or hang out with their family, if it's a family. Why aren't they being more social? Whereas the refugees sometimes wish they didn't have to fit in to somebody else's structure. They have been independent for a while and they want to be independent. Some hosts only want to commit for a month. So sometimes that can mean that there won't be much continuity for a refugee. Most of the housing hosts have housed our refugees for three or four months at least and some for up to a year. But I have one client who had to move five times in his first year and that's really disruptive. So that's been a big challenge for us.

Some things we're thinking about doing in the future is getting enough refugees - not LGBT refugees - to house them together or maybe partnering with other organizations. I know we've talked with IRC in Oakland about doing that. So that's a possibility, getting LGBT individual refugees together in the same apartment.

And finally I just want to talk a lot about volunteer support groups.

Amy: And Carol we've got a minute.

Carol: Okay.

Amy: Yes.

Carol: This program totally would not work without volunteer support groups. It's a thing that makes it because each of these refugees comes alone without support, without an anchor, without ties to the community. And it's the support groups we form that really make the program work. Sometimes we've worked with churches; sometimes we've brought together people and done training to bring them a support group. And they do the things that are listed. They provide practical support and they help with English. But often times they just provide community and family and I find that the refugees are really needing that, so it's enormously important.

And I will stop there. Thank you very much.

Amy: Thank you Carol. And keep typing your questions everyone; we've got a nice queue. And we're going to finish off the presentations with Juliane Ramic. Again she's the Senior Director of Refugee and Community Integration for the Nationalities Service Center of Philadelphia. Juliane?

Juliane Ramic: Hi. Great. Thank you guys so much for participating in this call and thank you for including me in this. So Nationalities Service Center is a refugee resettlement agency in the Philadelphia area. We are a USCRI affiliate, but we are also an organization with a 90 year history providing a wide range of services to really some of our region's most vulnerable newcomers.

So we were very fortunate several years ago to participate with Heartland Alliance, an organization based in Chicago. At the time they had received funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement to establish a technical assistance program to really looking to make sure that refugee resettlement agencies and our protocols and procedures were friendly and accessible. So we were very excited to be part of this. We were able to strengthen both our internal procedures and our organization and offer staff the opportunity for growth and development. But then we were also able to really examine and look at the services that we were able to provide.

Amy I'm going to ask for your help. I'm trying to advance the slide, but if you could help me move that slide forward.

So, some of the things that we did in preparing – or kind of welcoming refugees was our physical space, training and supporting staff and examining our existing service delivery system; and then considering partners that we would connect with. We often looked at resettlement as a bicycle wheel with the refugee at the middle. And when they first arrive they're tire or their wheel is not very strong or stable because they don't have spokes that lead out. The refugee at the center, they may have a resettlement agency as their primary point of contact. And we really want to help them build spokes or connections to other groups within the community. So what are those partners for LGBT refugees, what would that look like both in the delivery of core services but also beyond? We really took a lot of our inspiration from refugees themselves and looking at a lot of these issues. All of the presenters have really hit on this notion of wanting to prevent isolation.

And so the LGBT refugees that we've worked with have been some of the best self-advocates that I've ever worked with. And in advocating for themselves they would really talk about this, you know, this issue of isolation and what they wanted to do about it. And what they wanted support in doing.

So one of the steps that we took was with a refugee that we had resettled was we showed them, we did a walking tour of the city and showed them how to access services through the public library. And standing in a public building they were able to recognize that available to them free of charge was a gay newspaper. And they had this moment where they were able to really honor and recognize how powerful that was for them to be standing in a public building and feel accepted and connected by just being able to see that, that newspaper. That then enabled us to be able to talk about how we wanted them to feel welcome but if there are ever times when they didn't how would we help them to protect their safety and then to be able to report and advocate if there was ever a situation where they didn't feel welcome. So it was a good way to open the door.

So when we do an assessment of our physical space we looked at ways that we can provide indications and non-verbal clues to refugees that were in our building to let them know that we were welcoming of them. Certainly rainbow flags were always available and in plain sight. We had also at one point had a statement that we had translated that really talked out philosophy and that we were very open. And then we would do things like have the gay newspaper available, it still is delivered to our building and it actually disappears very quickly. But having things that would be representative available and in our space.

We focused a lot on training and providing support to staff. We did this by providing training in large settings so that staff could kind of get everybody in a room and be able to communicate a message or topic and provide that

training; but then also through conversations in smaller groups. There are a lot of times we would have staff who would say, “Look I’m a case manager and I’m from that individual’s country of origin. How can I make sure that when they see me they see me as someone who is an ally and not someone who represents somebody who may have oppressed them in our country of origin?” So being able to talk about those issues, you know, before a refugee arrived and throughout their service was very important.

We really took a close look at our case management systems and how we were talking about our services. So we did a form [INAUDIBLE]. How are we talking about the issue of gender identity and are we offering that option, of more of an open option to allow refugees to be able to express that? In reviewing bios of refugees, if we had a refugee who self-identified on a bio we recognize that as great strength of character. That meant that that refugee had the courage to be able to tell someone overseas and, you know, identify in that way; and that when they arrived we would honor and respect that in that same way. But then we also wanted to make sure that when a refugee arrived if they didn’t feel comfortable or safe at any point during their refugee processing that maybe they could after, you know, upon arrival; and so making sure that we had that balance.

We also in considering the partners that we worked with, we conducted targeted training. So if we could do a consultation and be talking about a group and giving them an update on the numbers of refugees that we plan to serve that year, we would also offer a discussion about making sure that the delivery of core services that we do in partnership with other organizations and other entities within the city, that they would be welcomed in the same way.

And I think one of the best examples that we have is that here in Philadelphia we have over time worked with academic medical institutions and health centers to form refugee clinics, to provide not only the basic health screenings for newly arriving refugees but also provide a medical home.

And so in the same way that we’re helping a refugee to find a medical home, we wanted LGBT refugees to do the same. So one of our clinics that was run as a residency training clinic—so residents did rotations through it so that they had experience providing refugee health—had a partnership with an LGBT clinic. So the residents that had gone through a rotation in the refugee clinic had also gone through a training within the LGBT clinic. So we targeted training to be able to talk to both. Each year, usually in July or August, we go in and we do a training for the new residents coming in. And we’ve incorporated a discussion about LGBT issues and inclusivity into our Refugee 101. And so it becomes a training that’s become very sustainable over time.

Amy can you help me advance the slide? Thank you.

So some special considerations - I’ll briefly talk about housing. I do feel like that was one of the greatest challenges. I love the model that was just spoken about, about providing that access to temporary housing. We struggled with that in that the resources for us to be able to do that would have been a volunteer coordinator or a liaison to help manage those relationships with the housing providers.

We were very concerned about placing a single LGBT refugee in housing with someone else. We knew that if it was somebody from their country of origin it would place them essentially back in the closet. And that was not something that we ever wanted to see happen. We also felt at times too we really struggled with finding studio apartments, many times they weren’t available; they weren’t affordable. And then it really was counter to - there is a refugee’s desire not to feel isolated. So our housing situation - we were always trying to help to put them into permanent housing at first, but many times one of the best strategies was that we would actually offer them a low-cost hotel. So we would put them in a hotel initially which is not ideal. But what it allowed us to do was first a conversation with the refugee and let them have the choice and offer them a range of options so that they felt that they had more of a say in that conversation.

One of our targeted training groups, you know, we didn't just train case managers, we also really targeted our employment team. And I'm very grateful that we did that because we have seen refugees who were successful in finding employment but also who suffered discrimination or harassment on the job. By having our employment team trained, the LGBT refugees were able to reach out to those staff members almost immediately after an incident happened and they partnered very well with our staff to begin to file the reports and to begin to assess for safety and work through those issues.

In doing that we had refugees who were partnering with staff who developed skills to be able to advocate for themselves in other situations. So we modeled behaviors and activities with them to be able to show them what their rights were, to show them how to navigate systems, and what to do in the face of adversity. And again, a lot of our employers responded very well in these situations and handled each situation in the way that we felt was very appropriate and really met everyone's needs.

For us to be able to address these issues of isolation it was very challenging to help the newly arriving LGBT refugees to access services and support within the mainstream LGBT community. There were still cultural and other barriers and there was also kind of this, I think we often talk here at NSC a lot about "a culture of birth but you also have a culture of migration." Your migration story informs a lot of who you are. And for them they're flight from their home country, their persecution stories, other things like that at times also made it a little harder for them to connect and integrate with the mainstream community.

So we actually took the lead in helping to bring together LGBT refugees, asylees and also those who were in the process of seeking asylum and help them to form a group. This was really based a lot on their conversations with us about isolation or a want to connect with others. And so we would do simple activities. We would have kind of a component that was a meeting and a discussion. I wouldn't call it a support group because it was far more informal, but with a kind of mental health component and an activities component. We put together monthly or quarterly calendars. They would know about events in advance and they would attend if they could. And many of them would, if they could and they were working they might try to see if they could arrange their schedule around it. We were able to provide that structure and then they were really able to take that on and sustain the group and activities without us. And that was the goal was to let this become a very organic, very connected group.

The one last component that I want to talk about a little bit too is that we also screened all of the refugees – LGBT refugees – that we worked with. We actually screened them for eligibility with services within a tortured treatment program, and we did find that there was a much higher likelihood that an LGBT refugee had experienced torture than the mainstream refugee population. So, I think making sure if there is a torture treatment or an ORR-funded program in your area making sure that you're connecting with them. Many of them were not interested in accessing services, but were also very comfortable or satisfied knowing that that service was available to them anytime that they needed it.

But, the longer they stay in Philadelphia, they're also connecting in other ways. Even though they can also come back. Many of them that we've worked with—I mentioned a little bit about our health clinic—went initially to a large medical practice within our city and they instead were connected to an LGBT clinic. We actually found that that clinic was one of the best ways for them to connect to the mainstream community. So the clinic was where they went – it offered far more than just physical health. They had a lot of well-being activities, they had groups. And it was a nice way for them to begin to kind of explore some of those connections.

So between some of the providers that we were able to help connect them with and then the group that we were able to form and the group activities they were able to conduct and do out in the community, that's how we helped to begin to bridge or build those spokes to help kind of give them that solid bike wheel, going back to that analogy.

Amy: Fantastic, thank you Juliane. And thanks to all of our presenters. You'll see that we are three minutes away from the top of the hour. So for those of you that can hang on just a few more minutes, I would like us to get to some of these questions. They are terrific questions; a couple that are easy to answer. Please go to the rainbowwelcome.org Website. There are some fabulous resources there that the Heartland Alliance Group put together.

And click on Resources for Service Providers and Resettlement Staff or Resources for Unaccompanied Children's Programs. That's rainbowwelcome.org. Also the Website that Sarah was talking about with the hate crimes, the laws; that is LGBTmap.org, LGBTmap.org then choose Equality Maps.

We have an interesting question here. A woman in Chicago is noticing the under referral of women or perhaps general difficulty identifying or directing queer women to my groups. I get many referrals for queer men. Do you have any ideas about outreach to women? Juliane do you have any suggestions there?

Juliane Ramic: Well I think the number of women that we worked with is very – our numbers were skewed more towards gay men as well. And I think that maybe that is something that we really need to think about when looking at refugee processing interviews. So for lesbian women are we able to create more of a safe space for them? I want to say that we had very few bios where refugee women had identified as being gay. But we did have more who then identified post-arrival. So that was some of the mix.

We often found, too, that they would also speak about the issue of isolation but they—it was interesting—I'm thinking of a really great example, it was very inspiring. Her way of wanting to connect to the community and preventing isolation was actually to volunteer and so she began volunteering for an LGBT youth center. And so the act of connecting was her wanting to give. So I don't know if creating volunteer opportunities, if that might be the way, but I think that's kind of what I have to offer.

Amy: No, that's very helpful. Another great question. You know, several of my LGBT group participants, the questioner says, have experienced stress-related feelings that their LGBT identity is against their religion or a sin. Do you have recommendations for connecting clients to welcoming communities of faith; or perhaps resources for LGBT refugees of faith? Some of my current clients are Muslim, some Christian. But I imagine over the years I will encounter a wide-variety of religions.

Anyone have some thoughts about that?

Sarah: This is Sarah. I would say that there are such a large and growing number of communities of faith that are openly welcoming and inclusive for all. And I think, of course we don't want to make anyone uncomfortable in being connected to faith communities if they're not ready for that. But I think reaching out in advance or after arrival to make those connections and invite individuals from those faith communities to meet, you know, just for coffee to be able to connect refugees to people that share their faith and share their identity can be really helpful.

And that's the thing that we've seen faith communities really eager and willing to offer that individual welcome.

Carol: This is Carol and I would add to that. In the Bay area there is a group of welcoming congregations and so we've tapped into that. But also within different mosques and churches there are actually some LGBT groups. And there's also LGBT groups for Middle Easterners and a good number of them happen to be Islam. So, you know, we've tried to reach out in a variety of ways. But I find that there are good people of faith who are happy to help. And recently I just contacted a Catholic church and I got many people there who are welcoming to an immigrant. So anyway.

Amy: Great. So about housing trends; we've got a couple housing-related questions. How do you ensure that housing hosts and their homes meet PRM requirements for safe-housing? And the second is the questioner needs

a little more clarity as to how hosted housing addresses the particular challenges to LGBTQ identified refugees compared to a traditional model of finding housing.

So Carol and Juliane do you have any answers there?

Carol: Well I'll jump in and start with the second question. We have to do hosted housing in part because of finances. In this area the amount of money that we have just would not afford a person to stay in his or her own apartment. So that's part of the reason we do it. But we find the other thing that happens a lot is it does reduce a sense of isolation. And some of the housing hosts have really become big supporters of our clients. And in terms of how do we ensure that it's safe, I go with a checklist and I visit all the potential homes before anyone stays there.

Amy: Great, any other answers about the housing? We have a question and we'll close out real soon. So what if - has anyone had issues with any staff that are resistant to working with an LGBT refugee and if so how might you have approached that or how might staff training help to make that a better situation?

Christine: This is Christine. I can try to speak to that question.

Amy: Great.

Christine: I don't have a specific example that comes to mind in terms of a staff member being resistant. I will add that we should definitely be thinking interpreters as well when we talk about staff or people working with clients that may be from the same culture and are feeling uncomfortable for some reason or not working with an LGBT refugee. I think it comes with cultural sensitivity training. When we say we're "culturally competent" it should go beyond just the different countries of origin of the clients we're working with. And so that should include LGBT training.

Just going back to the resources that are already available that may support someone that's working with a staff member that has resistance to working with an LGBT refugee. There's some really great videos that Heartland Alliance has put out that talk about being an ally. And there's folks, I believe there's a woman from a Muslim community, a gentlemen from Nigeria, and a Bhutanese man that kind of speak out to being an ally for that community, even if they don't identify as LGBT. That's something that I have used in a cultural sensitivity training with staff before.

Amy: Excellent. We're going to go ahead and end with this last question. So this question is do you know of any Websites or resources that discuss the dangers LGBT refugees face specific to their home countries. In other words laws, punishments, etc.?

Christine: This is Christine...

(Crosstalk)

Carol: This is Carol and I would just suggest the ORAM Website, O-R-A-M.

Christine: We're on the same page Carol. They have some really good country reports. I know specifically one out on Uganda that speaks to global conditions.

Amy: And I know the Heartland Alliance has also done work here. I think it was in Lebanon they've done some work. (Andrew), I don't know if you have voice access. Do you have any other thoughts on this? Or Sarah?

Juliane Ramic: This is Juliane. Heartland Alliance also has a great map. So there are some really wonderful country-specific, very in-depth resources. But there are also some maps of conditions by country that can be very good to start the conversation about kind of where things stand globally. And that's a good resource too.

Andrew: Hi this is (Andrew) from CWS. Another good resource is the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, IGLHRC.org (I-G-L-H-R-C) which has country condition information. That should be a good place to go and find some background.

Amy: Right. Well thank you everyone. I'm going to go ahead and wrap up. And here is a slide that tells you some upcoming events as they relate to ORR. We are recording this and a transcript and slides, all of this stuff will be available to you as registrants. And we will also post them.

Nathan or Heidi, what is the URL where they can find this webinar when we put it up?

Nathan: It will be on the ORR Webpage and we'll send out a direct link to participants once it's posted.

Amy: Great. So feel free to share this with your colleagues everyone. I really want to thank the presenters and all of you for attending this webinar. And please feel free to reach out to each other and continue your beautiful work. Have a great afternoon. Bye-bye.

Operator: That concludes today's conference. Thank you for your participation.