

# Refugee Health Literacy Program



## Cause for Action:

- Over 63,000 refugees come to the U.S. annually. From 2000 to 2014, over 86,000 refugees have resettled in New York State.
- Syracuse boasts one of the largest and most vibrant refugee communities in the United States with Onondaga County, resettling around 9,500 refugees over the past decade.
- This program connects students directly with Syracuse's vibrant refugee communities and promotes two-way conversations aimed at improving the students' understanding of the unique needs of our refugee communities while also empowering refugees to navigate healthcare systems.

## Where is the program located?

Catholic Charities of Onondaga County, Northside Christian Youth Organization (CYO), 527 N. Salina St, Syracuse, NY 13208.

## What does the Refugee Health Literacy Program do?

Our first goal was achieved by our peers engaging in weekly educational sessions on broad topics, ranging from: (1) *Lifestyle choices* (e.g. effective sleep, portion control, daily exercise), (2) *Preventative care* (e.g. screening, vaccinations, blood pressure monitoring), (3) *Primary care* (e.g., regular physician visits, dental care, mental health, maternal and child care), and (4) *Chronic conditions* (e.g., diabetes, obesity, sleep apnea). Our second goal was achieved by carefully crafting each of our presentations to promote maximum engagement from both our student volunteers and refugee participants. Pictures and diagrams are often emphasized and repeated over verbose slides to tackle language communication barriers. Where appropriate, we carried out mock healthcare-professional - patient interactions to emphasize questions our patients should be asking their physicians

## Who does the Refugee Health Literacy Program serve?

This program works primarily with refugees in their second year of resettlement.

## How does the program provide for this population?

A core component of successfully readjusting into the US requires a baseline understanding its healthcare system and new medical/wellness challenges. Infectious diseases or malnutrition are the predominant causes of mortalities in the developing world, while cardiovascular diseases and complications from obesity are the largest killers in the US. This program aids recently settled refugees in navigating the US healthcare system and highlights key components of shared decision making and pursuing their own wellness care.

**What would I do as a student volunteer?**

In a nutshell, make cool powerpoint slides on a current health topic, design fun activities, engage with an underserved population in interesting and low stress environment. Each session is led by two or three student volunteers.

**How often would I serve?**

Once or twice per week depending on the number of volunteers. Generally, Wednesday afternoons from 12:15 pm – 1:30 pm.

**What are the community impacts?**

Adjusting to a new nation as a resettled refugee can be challenging, and our healthcare system's incredibly complicated nature does not help. Our initiative hopes to contribute to their understanding by introducing important healthcare concepts in a fun, engaging and low stress environment.