

Script for RCUSA/ECDC “Leveraging Mutual Aid in Support of Refugees” Webinar

Slide 1: Title Slide

Sarah: Hi and welcome, thank you for joining us today. This webinar is the third in a Refugee Council USA series of webinars on supporting refugees during COVID-19. Other webinars in this series, along with related tools and resources, can be found at www.rcusa.org/covid-19.

Slide 2: Title Slide pt 2

Sarah: Today’s webinar is “Leveraging Mutual Aid Networks in Support of Refugees.”

Slide 3: Presenters

Sarah: We have two presenters today. My name is Sarah Seniuk and I serve as the Advocacy and Communications Manager for Refugee Council USA, a coalition of 29 non-profit organizations seeking to protect refugees, asylees, and other forcibly displaced populations. And I’m joined by Clare Mountfort:

Clare: [introduction]

Slide 4: Learning Objectives

Clare: We have three primary learning objectives today:

- Gain an understanding of mutual aid frameworks
- Identify which relationships and networks of your own can form the basis of mutual aid frameworks
- Takeaway tools for joining or beginning your own mutual aid network

Slide 5: Mutual Aid 101

Sarah: We’ll begin with a quick “Mutual Aid 101”. What is mutual aid? The long and short - people helping one another. Mutual aid is the understanding that people and communities are able to thrive when working cooperatively and in support of each other. Mutual aid is *not* charity and is different than the services provided by the government or nonprofits. Mutual aid is unique because it is from the community, for the community, and prioritizes those who are most vulnerable.

Every mutual aid network will look and function uniquely based on those who comprise the group and the needs of those being served. Hundreds of new networks have popped up across the country in response to COVID-19.

Slide 6: Mutual Aid 101 cont.

Sarah: Mutual aid reminds us that we are all able to help in some way as we are each a part of this community's well being. It lies entirely within a volunteer framework. It can mean getting groceries and medications to neighbors, checking in to make sure everyone is doing well

emotionally, helping to organize a shared pool of resources, assisting with translations or filling out forms. Everyone holds value in these systems.

Slide 7: Why is mutual aid important?

Sarah: Mutual aid is a key tool for ensuring our communities are supported and healthy and can and should be practiced at all times. As we seek to halt the spread of COVID-19, these networks become even more important.

Slide 8: Why is mutual aid important cont.

Sarah: Researchers are still learning everything they can about the novel coronavirus and COVID-19. What we do know so far:

- While any person can contract COVID-19, older people and people with underlying medical conditions (including those who are immunocompromised) are at [higher risk](#);
- The best way to keep each other safe is to [work to stop the spread](#) by practicing physical distancing with social solidarity.

The emphasis on social distancing means that many people are being asked to stay home, and avoid crowds. To make sure that everyone is able to social distance and get access to resources and support, we look to mutual aid.

Slide 9: Mutual Aid & Refugees

Sarah: Many resettled refugees have these relationships and tools in their home countries. Part of the responsibility of those who welcome refugees to the US is to help build these new community networks.

Slide 10: Mutual Aid & Refugees cont.

Sarah: Newly resettled refugees and asylees, and those who are well established in the US, know the importance of community support for their own success and wellbeing. We have the opportunity to leverage these long-standing community relationships to strengthen ourselves and our neighborhoods as we seek to respond to this health crisis.

Refugees, asylees, the communities that have supported them, and the communities they support, provide the basic framework for being able to activate a mutual aid system.

Clare will help illuminate how resettled refugees and the communities that welcome them help refugees to build these new community networks and skillshare by providing some examples from ECDC's affiliate network.

Slide 11: Building New Community Networks

Clare: Ethnic community based organizations in the network of Affiliates of the Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc are refugees who have been in the country for some time helping those that are newly arriving in the U.S. Many of these Affiliates began by gathering together to unite those of the same nationality or for English learning or other similar needs.

Slide 12: Mobile Pantry

Clare: Our Affiliate in Missouri responded right away to the needs of the refugees in their community within a week of the quarantine due to COVID-19. With the strength of relationships in their community they began delivering meals on March 24th. They make frequent distribution of whole meals rather than canned food. More than 25,000 meals have been distributed so far.

Slide 13: StitchEd

Clare: Many refugee women have never worked outside the home. Our African Community Center of DC Metro offers sewing classes and a place to gather and share resources. For those with children, there is childcare offered. This is a step that is aimed at building confidence, language skills, and workforce confidence.

Slide 14: Women's Empowerment Program

Clare: For the Women's Employability Program (WEP) our vision is to ensure gender-related services. Our Affiliate in Arizona provides women and families culturally-responsive services such as access to childcare and language support. They aim to remove the barriers that hinder women's ability to work. The women in the WEP program are a network for each other. They share and learn from each other's experiences, allowing them to overcome the many challenges for these women who were forced to leave their home countries to start anew in the United States.

Slide 15: Combined Arms

Clare: The SIVs (special immigrant visa holders) that have aided American military in their home countries are greeted as an American veteran at the airport in Texas. Our Affiliate there has partnered with an organization called Combined Arms. So SIVs are greeted warmly at the airport, given an American flag, and have the right to services accorded to U.S. veterans.

Slide 16: The story of Dr. Gatluak Thach

Clare: Dr. Gatluak Thach is a refugee from South Sudan, who bounced from camp to camp with his family before finally being resettled in the US. He supported himself through highschool and college, and after 10 years, was reunited with his childhood love Nyakuma in Nashville. He helped teach Nyakuma English in their apartment, and as word spread, other immigrants joined them in their home to learn English and discuss how to address the needs of their community. From here, the Nashville International Center for Empowerment was created.

Dr. Thach explained that “Through NICE, refugees and immigrants who have lived through marginalization, exclusion, and entrenched discrimination in their homeland are able to rebuild their lives with dignity here in the United States....I have been a part of the community trying to figure out how we can move forward, how we can empower those that are here and try to connect the dots.”

Slide 17: Next Steps

Sarah: Clare has just shared a number of amazing examples of how some community networks are built and fostered for newly resettled refugees. You may have experience with programs like any number of these, and they can serve as inspiration and the foundation for shifting to mutual aid. If you're feeling inspired to get involved the first step is to find out if there are any mutual aid networks in your area serving your community. You can do this by checking Facebook, Nextdoor, or WhatsApp threads, or going to mutualaidhub.org.

Slide 18: Starting Your Own Mutual Aid Network

Sarah: If there aren't any mutual aid networks that serve your needs you can start your own by mapping your “pod.” If you have been involved in any welcoming or skill sharing programs like those explored in this presentation you already have a relationship basis for mapping your pod.

Your pod represents you, your helpers, and the support they can provide. (including resources, logistics support, offering emotional support, etc.), and places where you can all access resources. You can find a pod mapping diagram and instruction links on the RCUSA website, as well as potential survey questions to consider circulating to the community to ensure that everyone's needs are met.

Slide 19: Summary

Sarah:

- Refugees and the communities that welcome them already have the tools and frameworks to join or start mutual aid networks.
- You can access tools for joining or starting your own at rcusa.org/covid-19/advocate.
- Use ECDC's examples to think creatively about what skills and resources you can share to contribute to a mutual aid network now, and how to maintain these networks beyond this crisis.

Slide 20: Final Thoughts

Sarah: Remember - there is no one way for mutual aid networks to look. Everyone has

something to contribute. Mutual aid is not about charity but is about communities working together to support one another.

Slide 21: More Information

Sarah: For more information about how to support refugees during COVID-19, please visit rcusa.org/COVID-19 or email questions to covid19@rcusa.org.

Slide 22: Survey

Clare: Thank you for joining ECDC and RCUSA. Please submit a brief survey of your experience at bit.ly/RCUSAFeedback.