Integration generally means combining parts so that they work together or form a whole. Community integration—or immigrant integration—is the dynamic process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. Integrated communities don’t eliminate conflicts in neighborhoods. Instead, integrated communities create a structure of connectedness so that people can collectively and effectively address the conflicts that affect them. Local communities—neighborhoods—and the housing in them play key roles in community integration.

Refugees are likely to be housed in diverse neighborhoods. Unfortunately, studies have shown that in ethnically-diverse neighborhoods, residents of all races initially tend to ‘hunker down’. Trust is lower and friends are fewer. Recent research also suggests that people who have social ties in their neighborhoods are actually healthier and happier than those without. Community connectedness affects service delivery for refugees, too: Those without neighborhood ties are more likely to rely solely on organizations when they need help, and refugees migrating out of unwelcome neighborhoods in a hurry are more likely to find themselves needing emergency services from resettlement agencies and ethnic community organizations. Finally, promoting community integration can help ensure that refugee resettlement is considered a positive thing for the both the receiving community and new arrivals.

**WHY is community integration so important?**

Refugees are likely to be housed in diverse neighborhoods. Unfortunately, studies have shown that in ethnically-diverse neighborhoods, residents of all races initially tend to ‘hunker down’. Trust is lower and friends are fewer. Recent research also suggests that people who have social ties in their neighborhoods are actually healthier and happier than those without. Community connectedness affects service delivery for refugees, too: Those without neighborhood ties are more likely to rely solely on organizations when they need help, and refugees migrating out of unwelcome neighborhoods in a hurry are more likely to find themselves needing emergency services from resettlement agencies and ethnic community organizations. Finally, promoting community integration can help ensure that refugee resettlement is considered a positive thing for the both the receiving community and new arrivals.

**WHO should be involved in community integration?**

By definition, everyone should be involved in integration somehow. Refugees and their neighbors; resettlement agencies and MAAs; police and property owners all have a role. See the list on the right for some basic ideas to get you started.

**HOW does community integration affect refugee housing?**

- Neighborhood issues such as crime prevention and school quality and housing issues like property maintenance and pest control often require neighborhood collaboration to address. Refugees trying to negotiate these problems individually are unlikely to encourage improvement on these issues.

- New arrivals able to rely on neighbors for guidance on issues around maintenance, regulations and tenant rights and responsibilities are less likely to have housing problems get out of hand and result in fines or eviction.

- In neighborhoods where refugees feel at home and connected, they are more likely to have someone nearby to assist in emergencies.

- Lack of a sense of belonging plays a role when refugees choose to leave initial placements for other locations. Subsequent broken leases make it harder for both the individuals and agencies to negotiate future housing.

- Refugees who feel unwelcome in their new homes are more likely to consider their stays in the United States a short-term circumstance, compromising long-term resettlement goals, like homeownership and citizenship.

10 Ideas for Promoting Community Integration in Housing

1. Ensure that housing is affordable enough that a family will be able to remain in the neighborhood and is high enough quality that they will want to stay.

2. Help refugees find work close to home. Fewer hours commuting means more hours for community.

3. Find out about and promote refugee participation in neighborhood events like community gardening and neighborhood cleanups.

4. Encourage landlords to open community rooms and offer to teach a class that draws together diverse residents.

5. Provide “cultural orientation” for landlords and neighbors to get acquainted with refugee groups; preferably before resettlement.

6. Include “good neighboring” in cultural orientation classes for refugees.

7. Conduct a class to teach neighbors how to creatively communicate around language barriers.

8. Host community dinners and block parties or encourage refugees to attend existing parties.

9. Start a resident council or promote refugee participation in an existing council.

10. Recruit and train “neighborhood ambassadors” of different ethnicities to welcome neighbors and encourage connections.

[www.refugeehouse.org](http://www.refugeehouse.org)
WHERE can I go if I have more questions?

As always, if you have questions about housing-based community integration or any other refugee housing issue, please get in touch with the Refugee Housing Program at refugeehouseinfo@mercyhousing.org. Explore more of our materials and find out about our technical assistance services at our website.

MORE ABOUT...
Community Integration

HOW does housing affect community integration?

- Refugees living in dangerous neighborhoods, in unhealthy housing situations or experiencing conflict with property management are likely to feel they need to remain in "survival mode," preparing to flee at any moment, which undermines community integration.
- Frequent moves caused by refugees’ inability to afford housing can disable the capacity to create ties with neighbors.
- Refugees’ interactions with their neighbors affects everyone’s perception of the larger community. If neighbors are silent, suspicious and isolated, refugees are more likely to feel they do not belong in the U.S. On the other hand, feeling safe and secure in their housing and having regular, positive interactions with neighbors can inspire refugees to engage more deeply in their new country.

ONE MAN’S EXPERIENCE WITH COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

”Hugo,” a Cuban entrant, was 65 years old when he and his young granddaughter were resettled into a large, diverse apartment complex. Hugo quickly found a job on the property as a groundskeeper. While he took pride in keeping his new home clean, he was frustrated that neighbors still threw trash everywhere, without seeming to value his long hours of hard labor. In addition to feeling underappreciated, he was lonely and was struggling to find someone to watch his granddaughter when she came home from school.

A volunteer encouraged Hugo to attend a series of community dinners hosted at the property. There, he was surprised to find many people from the neighborhood recognized him and valued his hard work, but didn’t know how to say so lacking a common language. Hugo shared meals with his neighbors and, finally feeling confident to share his feelings, explained his frustration with people littering. A few neighbors apologized, saying they didn’t intend offense. They explained the problem was that there were not many trash cans on the property, and it was easier to litter. The group of neighbors resolved to stop littering themselves and to encourage others to do the same. They also decided to write a letter to the property manager, asking for more trash cans to be put on the property.

At the community gatherings, Hugo found that many of his neighbors also had children who attended the same school as his granddaughter. Finding that Hugo did not have a consistent childcare option, one woman offered to have the granddaughter come to her house to play with her children after school until Hugo got off of work.

Resources

- Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) Integration Toolkit contains over 75 promising practices, academic research and a collection of resources.
  www.gcir.org/publications/toolkit
- E Pluribus Unum by Robert Putnam studies social capital in diverse communities online at www.utoronto.ca/ethnicstudies/putnam.pdf
- www.ImmigrantIntegration.org is a clearinghouse of news and information for people who want to promote the integration of immigrants. Advocates at every level can come together to network and exchange promising policy and program ideas.

Mercy Housing
Refugee Housing Program
1999 Broadway, Suite 1000
Denver, CO 80206
303.830.3300
www.mercyhousing.org
www.refugeehouse.org