



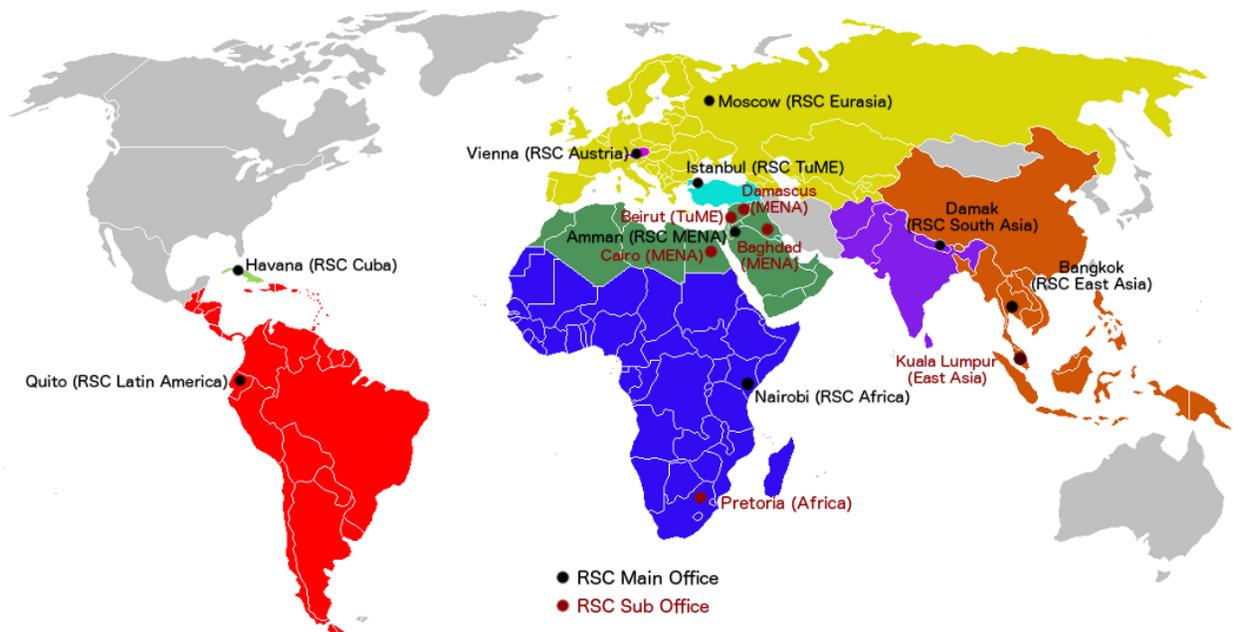
Resettlement Support Center Cultural Orientation Fact Sheet

November 2015

This document has been prepared by the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE) as a supplement to a webinar featuring CO Coordinators from Resettlement Support Centers presented at the 2015 CO Leadership Workshop. The webinar is intended to provide domestic CO providers with an overview of overseas CO. RSCs prepare refugees for resettlement in dynamic environments that are responsive to ever-changing needs. Therefore this factsheet does not document the permanent circumstances of RSC CO.

The contents of this factsheet were developed under an agreement financed by the United States Department of State under the authority of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, as amended, but do not necessarily represent the policy of that agency.

RSC Coverage Map



RSC Africa

Lauren Messing, Cultural Orientation Coordinator
Church World Service

Staff:

Nairobi: 28 dedicated CO staff, 5 staff dedicated to ESL, 300 child minders (throughout Africa), and 1,000 interpreters (throughout Africa).

Pretoria: 3 dedicated CO staff.

Locations: Main office in Nairobi, Kenya, with a sub-office in Pretoria, South Africa. Regional coverage of 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

Refugee Population: “The main populations that RSC Africa resettles are Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali. However, in FY15, RSC Africa resettled refugees from all the following countries of origin: Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.”

Program Overview:

Adult CO (targeted at those 15 years and older): 3 days (6 hours per day). Child (6-11) and youth (12-17): 3 to 5 days. Extended and supplemental CO is provided for populations including Congolese, those with Special Needs, Somali youth, and unaccompanied refugee minors. Attendance rates are very high with approximately 97% of scheduled and departing refugees receiving CO.

The geographic spread (49 countries) and variety of languages (approximately 100 throughout the region) can be challenging.

RSC Austria

Pat Blashill, Cultural Orientation Manager
HIAS

Staff: 1 CO Manager, 2 CO Trainers, 2 CO Interpreters

Locations: Vienna, Austria

Refugee Population: “We work exclusively with Iranian religious minorities: Jewish, Christian, Bahá’í, Mandaeen, and Zoroastrian peoples. Our CO applicants have a diverse mix of ages, religions, educational and economic backgrounds. It is difficult to generalize but overall, they are highly motivated learners – inquisitive, articulate and curious. We don’t anticipate any major changes in our caseload in the coming year.”

Program Overview: “We deliver a sixteen-hour CO class, and our typical class day comprises four hours of class time (plus breaks.) We request Adult CO for every applicant 15 and over. In the last year, we have also begun delivering CO to applicants who are eight to fourteen years of age. Youth CO is voluntary, but many parents and children want to the kids to attend. Our program and caseload are unique for many

reasons: many of our students are going to one city (Los Angeles); almost all of them are joining a US Tie in the States; and almost all of our students speak Farsi, which means we only need one Interpreter in the classroom. Our CO class attendance rate is about 98%. Our biggest challenges may be those that involve misinformation and unrealistic expectations. Many students have heard so much about the U.S. from their family and friends who already live there. Unfortunately, some of what they hear (or think they hear) is half-true or wishful thinking. We try to suggest that students beware of misinformation and seek more accurate and up-to-date information from the Resettlement Agency.”

RSC Cuba

Javier Morenza Romero, Cultural Orientation Coordinator

U.S. Interests Section

Staff: 3 CO staff

Locations: Havana, Cuba

Refugee Population: “All of our refugees are Cubans. We do not have many opportunities to work with refugees from other nationalities. Sometimes we work with Syrian and Iraqi refugees, but only one or two cases per year.”

Program Overview: “We provide Cultural Orientation to the entire family the day before the flight, focusing on the particulars of our refugee program. During CO session we use videos, posters and other available resources. This is the most important challenge, because it is very difficult to try and provide all the information in just two or three hours.”

RSC East Asia

Kelle Rivers, Cultural Orientation Coordinator

International Rescue Committee

Staff: 21 full time dedicated CO staff based in Thailand and Malaysia. Additionally, the CO program in East Asia relies on numerous interpreters, childcare providers, and camp runners.

Locations: “RSC East Asia consistently provides CO in 11 locations including the RSC office in Kuala Lumpur and 10 locations within Thailand (7 camp locations, a processing center on the Thai-Burma border, the RSC office in Bangkok, and the Bangkok detention center). CO is also provided on a regular basis in Jakarta and Medan, Indonesia and also at other detention centers in Southern Thailand.”

Refugee Population: “The majority of refugees receiving CO in Thailand and Malaysia are from Burma (mostly Karen and Karenni from camps along the Thai-Burma border and Chin living in Kuala Lumpur). Thailand’s camp populations have generally lived in remote refugee camps for many years, do not have regular work and have limited literacy and exposure to Western life. In contrast, most of Malaysia’s refugee populations live in urban settings where they work illegally. Both countries are seeing an increased number of Rohingya refugees, though not necessarily the same population. The majority of Rohingya refugees receiving CO in Malaysia have lived in the country for some time as urban refugees. The majority of Rohingya refugees receiving CO in Thailand have recently fled Burma on boats and been moved from smuggling camps to detention centers in Southern Thailand. They have very limited (or no)

education or exposure to Western life. Though smaller in numbers, urban refugees from around the world receive CO in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, including (but not limited to) Somali, Urdu, Tamil, Pakistani, Afghan, Iranian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.”

Program Overview: “Children, youth, and adults receive CO in separate age-appropriate classes. When resources/logistics don’t allow for age specific classes, a family day is planned during the course of CO to target specific topics relevant to everyone. Childcare is always provided to ensure full participation of parents, particularly mothers. RSC East Asia has two detailed Trainer’s Manuals, one for Adults and one for Children/Youth. Both include detailed lesson plans with lesson objectives, facilitation notes and materials, including picture sets. The Child/Youth curriculum also has an additional unit titled “Life Skills” with lessons on making friends, good decision making, etc. Classes for URM cases also include a specific overview of the URM program, which utilizes a PowerPoint presentation. Attendance is in the upper 90% in all locations.

The number of hours of CO depends on the location. Refugees departing from refugee camps in Thailand generally receive 3–5 days of CO. Refugees in detention centers and at the RSC office in Bangkok may only receive 1 day, though Rohingya cases usually receive 2 days. Refugees receiving CO in Kuala Lumpur typically receive 3–4 days. While we believe that more is always better in terms of contact time, a number of factors limit what can be provided.”

RSC Eurasia

Matthew Cecchetto, Cultural Orientation Coordinator
International Organization for Migration

Staff: 1 CO Coordinator and 3 CO Trainers

Locations: CO is conducted in Floriana, Malta; Emergency Transit Center (ETC) Timisoara, Romania; Emergency Transit Center (ETC) Humenné, Slovakia; Almaty, Kazakhstan; Bishkek and Osh, Kyrgyzstan; Dushanbe, Tajikistan; Chisinau, Moldova; Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and Kharkiv, Ukraine; Minsk, Belarus; Baku, Azerbaijan; Moscow, Russia; Tbilisi, Georgia; Ashgabat, Turkmenistan; Tashkent and Termez, Uzbekistan.

Refugee Population: “RSC Eurasia provides Cultural Orientation to U.S.-bound refugees located in various countries within Europe and Central Asia. Participants come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (most often Azeri, Armenian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Moldovan, Uygur, Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Angolan, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Congolese, Somali, Cuban, or Chinese), and are located in numerous countries within the region, requiring CO trainers to travel extensively. The program serves two large groups of refugees (defined by category rather than by ethnicity or nationality). “Lautenberg refugees” have a refugee claim based on persecution for religious beliefs or Jewish ethnicity by the authorities in their home countries during the Soviet era. Lautenberg refugees have immediate relatives in the U.S. and, as a rule, still reside in their countries of origin. The program also serves individually-referred refugees (referred to the program by UNHCR, U.S. embassies, or NGOs) who are individuals who fled their country of origin and whose refugee claim may be based on any of a plethora of reasons contributing to their well-founded fear of future persecution in their country of origin and lack of integration in their first country of asylum.”

Program Overview: “RSC Eurasia covers a vast territory within a variety of languages and nationalities so the big picture of CO in the region, upon closer inspection, is more like a tiled mosaic made up of differently colored and shaped pieces. Each location’s population has diverse needs and knowledge gaps. A CO session structure and content in Malta (for Somalis and Eritreans) is dramatically different in comparison to that of a session in Kyiv (for Ukrainians). At one site, there will be a debate about FGM (female genital mutilation), while at the other it will be about vaccinating children.

Lautenberg refugees (P2s) receive 6-7 hours of CO in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, and it is sometimes a challenge to convince this group of refugees that CO is beneficial and to attend. Their expectations regarding their resettlement are high and misinformation from unreliable sources influences their attitudes about their resettlement. Presenting CO as an integral part of their resettlement early in the process, as well as tailoring the curriculum to address the specific knowledge gaps of this population are ways to overcome these challenges.

Individually-referred refugees (P1s) generally have no ties to the U.S. They are offered 3-day CO sessions of 15-18 hours in Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Malta, Romania, and Slovakia and their attendance rate is quite high. CO delivery challenges (including various language and cultural profiles, low literacy rates, no formal education) experienced with this group are overcome using diverse didactic materials that maintain their interest and present information in a way that they can easily understand.”

RSC Latin America

**Tracy Vunderink, Cultural Orientation Coordinator
International Organization for Migration**

Staff: 1 CO Coordinator and 2 CO staff

Locations: “Quito, Ecuador and the Caribbean (at present classes are provided in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago). Central America (still in initiation phase): San Salvador, El Salvador, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Guatemala City, Guatemala.”

Refugee Population: “In Ecuador, the vast majority of the caseload is Colombian refugees. Colombians live in a number of small to large cities throughout the country, from the capital of Quito to Lagio Agrio which is a small city on the border with Colombia. Colombian refugees are from a variety of locations within Colombia, have diverse socio-economic backgrounds and circumstances. They have fled as a consequence of the armed conflict in Colombia. There have been various factions involved in the conflict and refugees have faced persecution from any number of actors. These include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as organized criminal groups such as narco paramilitary groups.

The caseload based in the Caribbean is mixed and refugees are located in a number of islands. These include Jamaica, Barbados, and Curacao. However the majority that we have processed thus far have been located in Trinidad and Tobago. The caseload is a wide variety of nationalities. CO has only been provided in Trinidad and those who have received CO, have been nationals of Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, yet the largest number hail from Cuba.

The caseload in Central America are minors who are nationals of the following countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and/or Honduras). The qualifying children are all under 21 years of age and unmarried, with a parent in the United States (who has legal status) who is petitioning for reunification. This caseload is new and the program is still developing, particularly as only a single CO class has been provided to date. These minors are also residing in the number of cities scattered across their respective countries. In general they wish to go the United States to be reunited with parent(s) and many have experienced or witnessed violence either in the home or outside. They often live in daily fear of the gangs operating in Central America, including the Mara Salvatrucha or 18.”

Program Overview: “Typically CO is provided 5 hours per day over the course of 3 days (15 hours total). CO is provided for Colombians in the IOM office in Quito. Attendance rates are quite high among the Colombian population. There are no specific or great challenges of note in working with the Colombian caseload.”

Regarding attendance with the Central American minors, this is yet to be seen, as the CO program began this year. We have planned to provide the minors with 3 days. There is at present space in the IOM San Salvador and Tegucigalpa offices. We, however, foresee space being a challenge in the future as the program has grown rapidly. The program is growing constantly in San Salvador. It may be decided in the future to offer CO off site in a hotel. This is planned for cases in Guatemala who will attend CO.

In the case of the Caribbean, it is not possible to reach all refugees given they are scattered among different islands and are departing at different times. CO trainers are sent on circuit rides to provide classes. As it is not cost effective to travel for small numbers of applicants, when possible, CO is organized in Port of Spain for larger group that is around 8-10 persons (or more). Given the caseload may speak a variety of languages, the classes are often organized into a specific language/dialect. If there is a small number of participants speaking a language it may be determined to provide 1 or 2 days CO, instead of the full 3 days. CO is provided in the space donated by a local NGO who assists refugees in Port of Spain. Challenges for Spanish speaking refugees, such as Colombians and Cubans, that we have observed is the perception or attitude that they don’t necessarily need to learn English in the US. This is particularly the case if they know they are being resettled to cities with large Spanish speaking populations, such as Miami. We must emphasize greatly that English is essential for them to learn and we attempt to lead them to the understanding of how beneficial it will be for them to learn. There are also myriad comparisons with families already resettled in the US and some of the information that is shared with refugees is regarding persons who are undocumented in the US. As such, this situation does not apply to the refugees, who can legally work, receive benefits, etc., it is the job of the CO trainer to differentiate between immigration status for refugees who compare themselves to other Latinos in the US, who do not have legal status. As in any location, misinformation and gossip affects the attitude of refugees and it is the work of the CO trainer to provide accurate information and illustrate consequences of particular actions/behaviors.

RSC Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Jamal Al-Fakhouri, Regional Cultural Orientation Coordinator
International Organization for Migration

Staff: 6 CO Trainers and 2 Child Care Providers

Locations: “2 permanent locations – Amman and Cairo. 10 Ad hoc locations (mobile CO) – Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, UAE.”

Refugee Population: “Mostly Iraqis (90%), but now shifting to at least 50% Syrians, with a mix of Iraqis, Palestinians, Somalis, Sudanese, Eritreans, Ethiopians, and few western African refugees.”

Program Overview: “20-hour training held for five hours a day over four days, designed to help refugees resettling to the United States have a successful resettlement experience and become productive residents (achieve ‘self-sufficiency’) over a short period of time.”

The RSC MENA CO program strives to help refugees obtain the necessary information, useful skills, and positive attitudes that make for a successful resettlement experience.

Based on the above training philosophy, we aim for training sessions that are *Participative*: from the moment they enter the CO training room, attendees learn that they are expected to be actively involved in their own learning. *Learner-centric*: each resettling refugee has their own concerns and issues to deal with regarding resettlement, and in CO training they are given the opportunity to voice these concerns and have them addressed. *Active*: we emphasize learning activities such as role plays; ‘games’ with teaching points; small group discussion, problem solving, and brainstorming, etc., over more passive training methodology such as lectures, trainer-centric Q&A, and passive viewing of DVDs. *Addressing attitudes and expectations*: several lesson activities focus on the psycho-social aspect of the resettlement process. Unrealistic expectations are addressed in exercises whereby refugees come to understand which of their expectations for resettlement are realistic, and which are not. *Varied in training methodologies*: different people learn better in different ways, so we employ a wide variety of teaching methodologies to ensure that everyone can benefit from the training.

The content USCO training in the Middle East covers the topics in the *Welcome to the United States* guide, with special emphasis given to topics of importance for our primarily Iraqi case load. Topics covered include: Employment, Housing, Resettlement Agency and Community Services, Education, Health, Preparation for Departure, US Laws, the Rights and Responsibilities of Refugees, etc. Over 85% of invited CO participants do attend a CO session in the region.

USCO in MENA’s biggest challenge is the cancellation of activities in Baghdad since June 2014 due to the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. Over 10,000 refugees have departed Iraq in FY2015 without the benefit of CO and as of today, there are no plans to go back to Baghdad to provide CO there. The main problem is that all USRAP activities are embedded with the US embassy there where space is very limited and movement of refugees in and out and within the embassy is very complicated and limited to only DHS interviews. The deteriorating security situation in Baghdad is prohibitive of planning CO outside of the embassy.

RSC South Asia

Pushkar Sapkota, Project Officer

International Organization for Migration

Staff: 13 dedicated CO staff in Nepal. 1 dedicated CO staff member in New Delhi. 3 on-call CO staff in Pakistan.

Locations: Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka

Refugee Population: “RSC South Asia covers 4 countries – India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The vast majority of refugees in this region are Bhutanese refugees living for more than two decades in two remaining camps located in the far eastern region of Nepal. The remaining countries have a mixed urban caseload of Afghans and Burmese (including Rohingya) with some Somalis, Iraqis and Pakistanis.

We anticipate a higher caseload in Sri-Lanka and even higher in Pakistan for the FY2016; Afghan refugees speaking two major languages, Dari and Pashto, are the major population in Islamabad and Pakistani refugees in Sri Lanka. There will be steady number of cases in India in FY2016.”

Program Overview: “The RSC South Asia United States Cultural Orientation (CO) program was established in early 2008 and is operated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Refugees who are resettling to the United States of America are provided with a pre-departure cultural orientation session, whose aim is to: Provide accurate information about the resettlement process and life in the United States; Help to develop realistic expectations; Assist in the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful adaptation in the new society; Empower women and seniors; Address concerns and questions. Under ideal circumstances, sessions are conducted over 3 to 5 days, 5 hours per day, with no more than 25 students per class.

The RSC South Asia CO program also offers special CO for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URMs). The CO unit tracks URMs coming through the pipeline and special CO classes are held, either one-on-one or in a larger group if the numbers warrant this. Session length is usually determined by the interest/capabilities of the URMs. In most of the cases, URMs also attend the regular 3-days sessions in the region.

Even though CO is not mandatory for resettlement, it is perceived as mandatory by our clients. This has contributed to a very good attendance rate. Overall, RSC South Asia has managed to provide CO classes to not less than 95% of all eligible refugees who departed. Some elderly or disabled may choose not to attend classes for health or other concerns. In some situations when refugees could not be reached or if they have special security concerns, particularly in the region, trainers hold Skype or phone training sessions with them. Efforts are made for those who attend and do not attend a class to receive a Welcome Guide and an IOM USCO Handbook (in Nepal).”

RSC Turkey and Middle East (TuME)

**Peter Vogelaar, Head of Affiliated Services
International Catholic Migration Commission**

Staff: “Turkey: 6 Trainers, 1 Team Leader, 1 Coordinator, 3 childcare attendants, 10 active interpreters. Lebanon: 2 Trainers, 1 childcare attendant.”

Locations: Istanbul, Turkey and Beirut, Lebanon

Refugee Population: “The majority of participants are Iraqi, Irani, and Afghan refugees. Syrian refugees are just beginning to come into the program in any significant number. This year we will be increasing the target number of refugee learners from approximately 5,500 to 9,000 between our two sites.”

Program Overview: “Adult refugees, 14 years of age and older, who have been conditionally approved for resettlement receive a three-day (21 contact hours) Cultural Orientation (CO) course by the CO staff

of RSC TuME located in Istanbul and Beirut. In Istanbul, children ages 8-14 are also invited to attend a three-day youth orientation course, conducted in a room nearby where their parents are attending class. Children younger than 8 years of age are provided child-care (including activities, toys, refreshments) in a nearby room while their parents and older siblings attend CO. Light refreshments and lunch are provided to all CO participants. Classes are delivered in English in Turkey and in Arabic in Lebanon. Interpreters facilitate communication as needed.

CO training takes place on site at the RSC TuME's buildings in Istanbul and Beirut, co-located with the resettlement staff. Each CO classrooms in Istanbul and Beirut hold 15-25 participants and are equipped with audiovisual equipment in addition to flip charts and whiteboards. CO is scheduled for refugees in Turkey during the same week as their medical exams. It is more convenient and cost effective to complete CO and medicals during the same week. Refugees remain in Istanbul for 4 days, with their accommodation, meals, and transportation to/from satellite towns coordinated, arranged, and paid for by RSC TuME.

In Istanbul, the CO team consists of 6 full-time trainers who facilitate classes for up to 120 adults and 20 youth (ages 8-14) each week. In addition, a full-time team leader provides mentoring, supervision, training, and curriculum design/materials for both Istanbul and Beirut CO operations. The Istanbul team also includes a full-time coordinator, who oversees class scheduling and composition in Turkey, schedules interpreters, manages human resources, and coordinates lunches, transportation, and accommodation for the 4 day stay in Istanbul. In Beirut, two (2) full-time Arabic speaking trainers facilitate trainings for an average of 40 adult refugee learners per week, without the need for interpreters. Child attendants in Istanbul and Beirut ensure adult participation in cultural orientation classes. RSC TUME utilizes several training methods to orient new CO staff and continue to upgrade skills and knowledge of existing staff; these include observation by team leader and the head of the program with feedback, and train-the-trainer methodologies. In addition, training exchanges between Lebanon and Turkey staff occur twice per year.

PRM's Overseas CO Objectives and Indicators is the curricular foundation of our CO program. Course content is aligned with each objective and emphasis three dimensions of facilitated learning; attitude, knowledge and skills. Methodology employed in the classroom is interactive featuring roleplaying, collaborative learning activities, group discussions and contextual games. CO trainers are equipped with instructional material, videos (in particular the Iraqi Employment Video), and realia that support a learner-centered environment. The RSC has developed its own workbook to accompany the Welcome to America workbook. Workbook content includes practical information necessary for preparation for travel as well as the first 90 days in the US. It also includes space for learners to express, in writing or in pictures, their fears and hopes. CO Staff and trainers regularly update material and introduce new activities throughout the year that meet program objectives. Trainers encourage refugees to be pro-active in making their own resettlement experience successful.

Our CO program aims to provide a safe space for refugees to ask difficult questions, acknowledge their fears, manage expectations, de-mystify the resettlement process, and recognize the skills and strengths which they will bring to the US."