

CREATING SPACES OF SUPPORT: COMMUNITY GROUPS AND
ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR MIGRANTS IN
DENVER

by
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This project examines how community groups and organizations in Denver, Colorado mobilize to create spaces of support for migrants, drawing from my own volunteer and internship experiences as well as ethnographic research. Over the course of Summer 2024, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with individuals working and volunteering in both formal organizations, such as the refugee resettlement agency, International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Denver, and an informal network, a neighborhood-based Facebook group named Central Park & Park Hill - Newcomer (Migrant) Support. Through this research, I identified four primary ways these groups function as social networks for migrants: building trust and relationships, utilizing social and traditional media, connecting migrants to resources, and the shared motivations and values that keep them driven to support. My participant observation and volunteer work alongside interviewees offered firsthand insight into the challenges faced by asylum seekers compared to refugees, particularly around access to governmentally funded services. This thesis highlights how community-driven efforts often fill critical gaps left by governmental efforts, especially in recent political hostility toward migrants. By uplifting the experiences of those on the ground, this work emphasizes the necessity of supporting all migrants equitably, regardless of legal status, and the enduring importance of local social networks in shaping migrant resettlement journeys.

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Preface

Growing up in Denver, a place with sanctuary city policies where immigrants make up 12% of the total population (Vera, 2023), I have understood the value and importance of welcoming all immigrants into our community, but have also learned of the systemic injustices faced by these populations. Being able to study Global Studies and Spanish in college helped me take courses to learn more about immigration and the challenges faced by migrants, specifically those traveling from Latin American countries. I was first introduced to this research during the Winter of 2023, when my neighbor Darcy invited me over to her house for a birthday party she was hosting for a woman who recently came from Venezuela, whom she had met at a nearby shelter while volunteering. Darcy knew I spoke Spanish, and she wanted my help translating between the families and other volunteers from the neighborhood. At the event, I was able to get to know many of the migrants and hear their stories, as well as the volunteers from my community. They told me they met each other through a community Facebook group named Central Park & Park Hill - Newcomer (Migrant) Support. Seeing my community members working together to support new migrants in Denver inspired me to join the group and sparked my curiosity about how this group mobilized to provide support for migrants.

Additionally, I wanted to learn what other organizations were helping to support migrants in Denver, and found the International Rescue Committee (IRC), where I was fortunate enough to intern as a Refugee Resettlement Casework Intern on the Casework Team in the Summer of 2024. My positionality in this research is unique in the sense that I was working alongside neighbors in a community I had spent my whole life in and was able to use my bilingual knowledge as well as my general Denver knowledge to better understand how both groups function to provide support for migrants.

With this prior knowledge and my recent volunteer experience for this research, I understand the value of the various organizations that devote their time to facilitating the arrival and resettlement of migrants despite legal obstacles.

Introduction

Immigration has historically been a contested issue in the United States, with constant limits on who ‘belongs’ in the country and who does not. In Colorado, immigration issues are a large part of the state’s history. In 1998, when both Democratic and Republican parties were against illegal immigration, Denver Mayor Wellington Webb stood against his own Democratic party and welcomed all immigrants by stating, “We welcome all to share Denver’s warm hospitality” (Harris, 2025). This caused Colorado Republicans to push for stricter policies in the 1990s, similar to President Bill Clinton’s militarization of the Southern Border. When I started my research in 2024, Joe Biden was the Democratic President in office and provided funding for NGOs like the IRC, as well as granted Temporary Protected Statuses for Venezuelans, which he extended for about 600,000 Venezuelans just 10 days before he left office (Martínez-Beltrán, 2025). As I started to piece together this project, aimed at uplifting these wonderful volunteers as well as the migrant community they support, President Donald Trump came into office and directly targeted aspects of the positive work I had been researching. Specifically targeting Aurora, Colorado when social media posts and videos were created falsely claiming that a Venezuelan gang had taken over an apartment complex in Aurora, which spread in many pro-Trump communities and became amplified by President Trump during his rallies. In a rally in Aurora in October of 2024, he stated, “Kamala has imported an army of illegal alien gang members and migrant criminals from the dungeons of the third world, and she has had them resettled, beautifully, into your community to prey upon innocent American citizens, that’s what they’re doing. And no place is it more evident than right here” (NPR, 2024). Using videos of Aurora apartments as an example to spread Trump’s anti-immigrant ideals exacerbates national

consciousness and generalizes false information about immigration in Denver as well as the United States.

On January 21st, 2025, Trump created an Executive Order suspending US Refugee Resettlement, which meant suspension for all overseas refugees planning to come to IRC Denver, as the IRC is a part of the suspended USRAP. This is devastating for refugee resettlement agencies everywhere as they continue to support the current clients despite these circumstances. Executive Order 14165 was created around the same time, which focused on securing the U.S. southern border by increasing physical barriers and creating more detention centers, further exacerbating the difficult journeys that asylum seekers go through. As a part of Operation Lone Star, created by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Venezuelan migrants were bused from Texas to Denver to shift the burden of immigration to other states that were more liberal and welcoming to migrants. This order, along with the increased presence of ICE in all parts of communities, sparked a distressing change in posts in the Central Park Facebook group. Migrants expressed fear of taking their kids to school or showing up for work out of fear of ICE's presence. Many wanted to self-deport back to Venezuela or had family members taken from their homes by ICE. This added sense of fear that the administration brought has made keeping the spaces of support very difficult for volunteers within the Facebook group. They have once again shifted their focus to connecting migrants to what is needed most presently and doing so in the safest way. Both groups and their members have consistently advocated against the actions of the current administration, and as IRC has posted via Instagram, "Stopping refugee resettlement to the U.S. is a step backward and humanitarian aid is lifesaving." Despite these challenges, formal and informal organizations have been playing a significant role in resettling refugees and assisting asylum seekers.

This research analyzes how local community groups and organizations mobilize to produce spaces of support for migrants as social networks in Denver, Colorado. Understanding the aspects behind how the organizations function and provide support is crucial to see the importance that community organizations like these have on immigration in the United States and the resettlement process of migrants. Communities like Denver support new migrants as they enter the country and often have a grassroots approach when it comes to assisting them. I observed different groups working to help migrant populations, like NGOs, local neighborhood groups, and the City or State governments. As I witnessed my own neighborhood working to help an influx of newly arrived Venezuelan migrants, I saw the exclusion of this population from NGO and governmental services because of their asylum-seeking status. However, members of civil society stepped up and rendered much-needed help. This raises the question: how do local community groups and organizations mobilize to produce spaces of support, and how do they function to support migrants of different statuses?

Through my interviews with nine individuals who currently work in an organization that supports migrants in Denver, I found that spaces of support have four common functioning social network features. These four mechanisms include building relationships, using social and traditional media, connecting migrants to resources, and motivation and values-based support. The ethnography aimed to compare two different organizations, where I conducted interviews and volunteered. My aim is to understand the differences in who is served within the spaces of support, whether they are refugees or asylum seekers. In this project, I will use categories to describe individuals interchangeably, allowing for a more accurate description of these different groups of people.

Before interviewing the participants, I had communicated with various volunteers of the Facebook group, as they are members of my Central Park neighborhood, and I volunteered throughout the summer of 2024. During this time, I also worked as a Refugee Resettlement Casework intern at the IRC, and was able to communicate with members of the Casework team to learn about this field of work and the role it plays in working to support migrants as they resettle into Denver.

This work aims to uplift and amplify the voices of these individuals who are devoting their time and careers to this work, creating an ethnography that helps understand from their perspective how communities and organizations work together to support migrants. It acknowledges how status differences may affect the type of support but emphasizes that we must work towards equal support of migrants regardless of status, race, class, or gender. Chapter 1 provides the historical context of NGOs and informal support groups, as well as contextualizing the City of Denver to better understand the background in which these spaces of support function. Chapters 2-5 go into ethnographic detail of each of the four themes and ways that both organizations support migrants, as well as their connection to previous literature about the subject. Each theme encapsulates the experiences of the interviewees, as well as my own experiences, to help understand how these groups mobilize and function. Finally, I draw conclusions between groups and across themes to connect this research to broader implications of how necessary these individuals and groups are in the process of supporting migrant's lives as they resettle into a new place like Denver.

Vocabulary

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO): These groups are defined as “a group of like-minded individuals, unaffiliated with any government, who seek to affect public policy and/or provide services to a community” (Irwin, 2015). They operate outside of government control, though they may receive funding from the government.

International Rescue Committee (IRC): An example of an NGO that is a global humanitarian aid, relief, development, and pro-international-migration organization that aids immigrants, refugees, and asylees attempting to enter the United States through its network of 29 offices across the country mainly in large cities (Influence Watch, 2024).

Sanctuary City: A city that has enacted policies to prioritize the safety and well-being of all residents by limiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities to protect its noncitizen populations (Bryant, 2025). Denver has sanctuary city policies, but is not formally labeled a sanctuary city.

USRAP: This stands for the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USCIS, 2024). It's the system where refugees are resettled in the United States after being recognized as refugees by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

ICE: This stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is a federal agency responsible for the enforcement of U.S. immigration laws, such as arrest, detention, and removal of undocumented immigrants.

Refugees: According to the IRC's website, refugees are defined as someone who has been forced to flee their home because of war, violence, or persecution, often without warning.

Asylum Seekers: An asylum seeker is defined as someone who is also seeking international protection from dangers in his or her home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been determined legally.

Migrants: Migrants are defined as someone who is moving from place to place, within their country or across borders, usually to seek better opportunities (IRC, 2024).

Methods

This research was inspired by my community-based volunteer experience in the Denver area working with my neighbors to support migrants in our community. This work and the needs that were displayed furthered my interest in the groups and ways to support migrants, specifically refugees. A well-known NGO, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), had an office in Denver and was accepting summer interns, so I worked as a Refugee Resettlement Caseworker from July to September of 2024, to get a more hands-on and comprehensive understanding of the immigration system and the resettlement process in Denver. After this internship experience and continuously volunteering with the Central Park & Park Hill Newcomer (Migrant) Support Facebook group, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews. Four participants were from the Casework team at IRC Denver, and four were community volunteers a part of the Facebook group. I had met each participant briefly while interning and volunteering, and in September and November of 2024, I reached out via email, Teams, or text message to see if they would be interested in scheduling an interview. The interviews took place both in-person and on Zoom and were all audio recorded, lasting from 15 to 45 minutes. I used the recordings, as well as a transcription service, to create separate documents with the transcriptions while going through and making sure the transcription was correct. The interviewers followed the interview guide with specific questions in order; however, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, participants were able to focus more on certain questions and include other responses or expand on previous answers. I wrote ethnographic field notes after each shift at the IRC, and after volunteering with newcomers and neighborhood community members. Additionally, after the interviews, I wrote down different ideas that came to mind based on the responses. My research with human subjects received exemption approval

from the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board, Study #00001470. These methods were sourced from James Spradley's books, "Participant Observation," which assisted in my production of ethnographic field notes while observing the different support groups, and "The Ethnographic Interview," to help with the interview and actual written ethnography portion of my research.

Interview Guide

1. Please state what group you are a part of, and if you are a part of any other groups working to support refugees or asylum seekers in Denver.
2. How and when did you get started with this work?
3. Did you have previous experience in the field before joining the group?
4. What specifically motivates you to help support refugees/asylum seekers?
5. For my thesis, I have defined your group as "formal"/"informal", in your opinion what aspects of the group match this definition, and what aspects contradict it?
6. What is your group's "place at the table" or the unique role among governmental groups, faith-based organizations, and formal/informal groups?

7. How does your group's work differ from who it supports; either refugees or asylum seekers or both? And why?
8. What are some strengths and weaknesses of your support group, specifically thinking about the structure/formality (formal or informal)?
9. How have the groups evolved since you started, and where/how can they be improved?
10. What is the specific context of Denver as a city that allows it to be a city providing support for refugees and asylum seekers in various ways?
11. The concept of deservingness is defined as "the ways in which some groups/individuals but not others are considered worthy of attention, investment, and care" Have you seen this occur within your work or have you had to choose who "deserves" support?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience in the group?

Participant Demographics Table

In IRC or Facebook Group?	Pseudonym	Gender	History of Migration	Length of Involvement in Group
Facebook Group	Darcy	Female	No	2 years
Facebook Group	Jo	Female	No	2 years
Facebook Group	Tasha	Female	No	2 years
Facebook Group	Janet and Jake	Male (Juan) and Female (Janette)	Yes, Yes	2 years
IRC	Alice	Female	Yes	2 years
IRC	Marnie	Female	No	4 years
IRC	Miranda	Female	No	6 years
IRC	Harry	Male	Yes	1.5 years

Data Analysis

After each of the eight interviews was conducted, I uploaded each transcription as well as the audio recording into a secure folder on my Google Drive. By going through and revising the interview transcripts, I made notes of my thoughts and potential themes that stood out across the responses. I created four prevalent themes, with smaller subthemes, across all interviews, which helped to understand how local community groups and organizations mobilize to produce spaces of support, and how they function to serve different types of migrants.

Thematic Code

Building Relationships and Trust • Trust • Relationships • Connections • Humanizing • Boundaries
Creating Community and the Role of Social and Traditional Media • Community • Media's effect • Role of social media
Connecting to Resources and Support Systems: Understanding the Timeline of Support • Connecting to Resources • Funding • Urgency vs. Long-Term Support • Formalness vs. Informalness • Deservingness/Prioritizing

Motivations and Values to Support

- Motivations
- Values
- Past experiences/Family history

Limitations

Because this is an undergraduate thesis project, I was limited in the resources available, especially after leaving Denver in late September to start my final year in Eugene at the University of Oregon. I could only consistently intern and volunteer in Denver for one Summer, which limited the field notes taken and the number of interview participants, so as a result, it limited the number of thematic codes chosen. Initially, I created 10-12 thematic codes from the interviews, but because of space restraints in an undergraduate thesis, I had to rule out many of them. Due to the relatively new creation of the Facebook support group and ever-changing immigration policies from the state and national levels, data analysis is evolving and cannot all be included, even as I write and defend my thesis. Since my sample was only pulled from one refugee support NGO and one community migrant support Facebook group out of so many, it may not fully represent the ways local groups and organizations in other places mobilize and function to produce spaces of support. Additionally, because I took on the role of a researcher to collect data for this project, this affected my interactions with the participants. I was actively working in both groups but was asking more questions to gain more information about the functions of the group, rather than participating wholeheartedly without research as motivation. This could have affected the trust of the participants, as well as the information they chose to share with me. With the shift in administration and the many Executive Orders limiting refugee

and migrant support in 2025, I was limited in the timeline of my project and could not continue to interview and work with these groups to understand how the inner workings of the group and the support they could provide have shifted. However, through my interviews with these wonderful caseworkers and volunteers, volunteering and interning for each group, and creating thematic codes, I was able to understand the role and the important role that these individuals and groups serve in the Denver community in supporting migrants.

Chapter 1: Formal vs. Informal Support for Migrants: A Historical Context in Denver

The number of migrants entering the U.S. has increased exponentially over the years, from a total of 34 million migrants in the year 2000 to 51.4 million in 2024 (CIS, 2024). Individuals travel to the U.S. for various reasons, including work and educational opportunities, escaping unsafe conditions, or reuniting with family. Unfortunately, because of certain policies and practices in place, America has not become a welcoming place for migrants. The systems are broken and are consistently at the forefront of issues between political parties and policymakers (American Immigration Council, 2023). Many support groups run by humanitarian volunteers were informally created because of these unjust policies enforced by the U.S. government to assist refugees and asylum seekers as they continued to travel and resettle in America (MIRA, 2023). In Denver, these groups became crucial as about 42,000 total migrants, both refugees and asylum seekers, arrived in the Denver metro area from December 2022 to the present (Summers, 2024). Through Facebook groups and faith-based organizations, the number of participants in these informal support groups grew to tend to the needs of the incoming migrants who were bussed from the Texas border to Denver. Larger NGOs in Denver with more formal support were able to continue their services to support refugees during this influx of migrants, but many were turned away because they were seeking asylum and did not have refugee status. Community members and volunteers all around Denver stepped up to support them upon arrival with donations, apartment hunting, and opportunities to work and support themselves.

Therefore, understanding the history and role of formal support groups, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS), as well as informal support groups, such as community volunteer Facebook groups, is crucial in understanding the specific similarities and differences in

supporting migrants. Specifically, the differences between the status of refugees and asylum seekers influence which group supports them and the social capital they gain from them. Social capital in the context of migrants can be defined as “the resources that are derived from social networks and social relationships that can enable an exchange of health information, spread knowledge, establish cultural norms, health beliefs, and normative behaviors, and facilitate emotional or financial support” (Saadi et al., 2023). There are two types of linking social capital, links to institutions or interpersonal links. When linking to institutions, individuals and communities gain access to groups with power, status, or resources. Linking social capital interpersonally, however, can be ‘bonding’ through neighbors, or friends, or ‘bridging’ between different groups or demographics of people (Saadi et al., 2023). In terms of formal support groups, social capital is linked to formal institutions like the IRC to provide resources for migrants. With respect to informal support groups, like the Denver community Facebook group, social capital is linked to bonding with neighbors as well as bridging between different groups, faith-based organizations, other social media groups, etc., to provide resources to migrants. This concept helped frame my thinking for this research to understand the role of social networks.

However, the concept is simplistic, and its validity has been questioned previously by scholars who see it misleading in certain concepts. Smith & Kulynych critique social capital and the politics of the language around it. Specifically, how the word ‘capital’ is associated with economic capitalism and wealth, which is very different from the view of social capital and its role in civil engagement and social life of individuals (Smith & Kulynych, 2002). Especially in the context of support groups for migrants, this concept does not encapsulate the complexities of the ways these groups function. This project employs the concept to highlight the importance of

social networks and how they manifest formally and informally, bringing attention to their efficacy and limitations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

To understand the difference in who benefits from these different types of social capital in terms of migration, focus must be drawn on the difference between refugees and asylum seekers. The benefits from social capital are likely to manifest differently for these two groups. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their home because of war, violence, or persecution. They are unable to return home because their native lands are unsafe. One of the ways to obtain refugee status is to start the application process abroad before migrating to their host countries. Asylum seekers are defined as those who are also seeking international protection from dangers in their home country, but whose claim for refugee status hasn't been determined legally. Applying for asylum can be done at a border or any time after crossing the border, and not every asylum seeker will be recognized as a refugee (IRC, 2024). With these different statuses, different levels of support are provided from formal and informal groups. Thus, delving into literature that describes the characteristics of each group can help us understand how social network support for migrants is structured.

Along with governmental policies, NGOs are crucial in supporting asylum seekers and refugees. Non-governmental organizations have various roles in assisting displaced people and have been established “with the encouragement of the wider 'international community' or as citizens have recognized the need to organize themselves into communities of interest” (Lester, 2005). The term was coined in the 1940s and defined as “a group of like-minded individuals, unaffiliated with any government, who seek to affect public policy and/or provide services to a community” (Irwin, 2015). They are often not-for-profit organizations that can serve as a voice

for the people whom the government underrepresents. NGOs are an integral part of the refugee protection process because they work to improve policies and laws as well as working directly with refugees and asylum seekers. Governments may believe that NGOs are out of touch with policy decision-making, but arguably, government officials are completely out of touch with the life experiences of refugees themselves (Lester, 2005). The unique ‘place at the table’ of NGOs can be backed up by the three types of authority they hold: expert authority, moral authority, and logistical authority (Schrover, Vosters, and Glynn, 2019). Expert authority is the knowledge that organizations have surrounding rules, laws, and statistics to fully understand the processes. Moral authority is a crucial point to make and is truly what sets them apart from governmental organizations. NGOs claim the moral high ground to fight issues like the harsh treatment of refugees and asylum seekers on a more humanitarian level. Finally, logistical authority occurs when they have proven that they can make an impact based on previous efforts. All NGOs hold these authorities in various ways, but the formal structure can create important support efforts for refugees. Being separate from governmental organizations is important because when governmental policies lack resources, NGOs are present and willing to step up and provide support in various ways.

As NGOs focus on their various formal responsibilities for refugees and asylum seekers, there are informal support groups that also deserve a ‘place at the table’ but aren’t formally acknowledged. These informal groups are made up of volunteers within a community who have come together informally to help support a cause. They often use social media such as Facebook groups to connect and act with a sense of urgency to directly help. The informality of these groups is extremely important because they can use their community to support another specific community by volunteering their free time. Often, the issue is prevalent in their neighborhoods,

but it can also manifest into supporting a cause much further away. Specifically, when refugees and asylum seekers are initially arriving in the U.S., they often have limited supplies and are primarily focused on obtaining necessities. This is where these informal volunteer support groups fit in and can mobilize to create donation centers for food, clothes, and directly interact with migrants to understand their specific needs. Specifically, these groups aim to help asylum seekers who may receive less formal support than refugees because of their status. Employment accessibility is vastly different for asylum seekers than for refugees. Asylum seekers may file Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, 150 days after filing the asylum application. Individuals are not eligible to receive an Employment Authorization Document until the asylum application has been pending for 30 days, resulting in 180 days as the minimum amount of time to receive an EAD (USCIS, 2024). During this time, they have not reached asylum status, and without work permits, there is no way to generate income. Community-organized support groups on Facebook ask community members if they have openings for odd jobs like car detailing or snow shoveling. Others search for opportunities to use skills from previous occupations, like nail painting or selling homemade food. This allows for some income to support entire families while they wait for their status and work permits to find more reliable opportunities. Along with material aid like basic goods and provisional housing, social networks like Facebook groups create interpersonal contacts for asylum seekers to receive information about employment opportunities, education, health services, or potential legal services (Hernandez-Plaza et al., 2006). These seemingly small connections on a social media platform are the backbone of initial support across different sectors for many of the asylum seekers. These informal community groups must have different characteristics to effectively collaborate for migrant support, like mutual trust, a shared vision, consistent communication, and concrete goals

(Mattessich et al.,2017). Mattessich calls these the “ingredients for the success of collaboration,” and they are important for any group to function, especially informal support groups that are run voluntarily and via social media platforms. After understanding the roles informal and formal support groups play for migrants, it is necessary to contextualize them in the city of Denver.

Specifically in Denver, the report done by the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs includes the evolution of policies, practices, and advocacy for immigrants. Since 2009, many more pro-immigrant policies have been implemented, most recently HB21-1194 in 2023, to create Denver’s Immigrant Legal Services Fund and expand the availability of free legal services and representation to low-income individuals in immigration proceedings. City and state policies have been shown to be progressive and inclusive when it comes to supporting a gradual increase in immigrants. In December 2022, migrants from the Southern border, mainly from Venezuela, came to Denver in the hope of a new beginning. The informal support groups initially helped with the basic needs of migrants entering during the winter, but as of April 2024, Denver created the new Denver Asylum Seekers Program. The program will connect those already in the city’s newcomer shelter system to housing assistance options as well as a pre-work authorization readiness program titled “Work Ready” (Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs, 2023). These efforts are extremely helpful for asylum seekers in Denver and are a much-needed program. However, long-term support is only offered to people who were in the city’s Newcomer Program shelter system on April 10, 2024. Anyone who enters the shelter system after the stipulated time is provided short-term shelter and assistance to travel to a different destination (Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs, 2024). This program can only support the limited 1,000 asylum seekers in Denver when there are still another 40,000 that need the support of the city. As shown through the policies of Denver, there is still a gap that can only

be bridged by NGOS and community volunteer Facebook pages to benefit the social capital of refugees and asylum seekers.

The social capital of refugees and asylum seekers is significantly influenced by the funding allocated to each group based on their status. The IRC, for instance, is perceived as a formal organization primarily due to its consistent funding from the U.S. government, grants, and various foundations. This includes \$337.2 million from the U.S. government and hundreds of millions of dollars through grants from the U.S. government. As of March 2024, IRC has received \$14,310,874 from the U.S. government in grants for refugee-related services in 2024 alone (Influence Watch, 2024). This money, as well as various donations, helps keep the IRC running and allows the organization to support refugees. Once a refugee's legal status is established, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention, governmental funds are spent on refugee resources. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, wait for their asylum case decision and cannot legally work. They lack the public benefits provided to refugees and rely on inconsistent funding from informal groups to connect them with other local non-profit groups and volunteers that can help them. Unfortunately, this can lead to poverty, labor exploitation, and human trafficking (Workie et al., 2022). Along with previous sources of funding discussed, the city of Denver has also used its funding to help with the influx of migrants from the Southern border. The City of Denver has reportedly spent \$70 million in goods and services for migrants administered by the city and established non-profits, with a projected \$90 million spent by the end of 2024. For this massive amount of funding, they used federal funding from existing programs and city grant programs (Summers, 2024). Compared to other cities, Denver's prioritization of migrant aid is important in funding non-profits and helping keep asylum seekers off the streets when they arrive. However, these funds are not helping asylum seekers directly and are only funding more

formal non-profits that still may not be able to reach all migrants with their support. Sources of funding can often restrict who formal and informal organizations can help, but funding for both refugees and asylum seekers is necessary. This requires the benefits from the city, as well as multiple support groups to provide funding.

In the context of Denver's informal and formal support groups' roles, the specific actions of support and how the groups work collaboratively are necessary to see how they benefit the social capital of migrants. The formal support group, IRC, is a global humanitarian aid, relief, development, and pro-international-migration nongovernmental organization that aids immigrants, refugees, and asylees attempting to enter the United States through its network of 29 offices across the country (Influence Watch, 2024). Refugee cases can be referred while they are abroad and then are processed for admission through a pre-screening interview. Once they are approved, the Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) request assignment to a U.S. Resettlement Agency (RA), such as the IRC. Once the IRC has accepted the resettlement case, travel arrangements are made, and the refugee arrives at a location within the U.S. (IRC, 2024). Specifically, within the IRC Denver office, there are core services provided by the Casework Team immediately after a refugee arrives in Denver to support the organization's mission of helping people survive, recover, and gain control of their future. Because it is a formal organization, there are more specific timelines for what services are offered, ensuring that most clients have enough time to independently live in Denver after those 90 days.

The informal support groups have less structure and formality with how the support is being offered, as well as the timeline for what support is being delivered. Because it cannot easily be measured, looking at how social media influences the social networks of support for migrants can help understand how the group functions in providing resources. Prior research has

discussed these types of groups as ‘third sector organizations’ that are complementary to the state policies and formal NGOs. With a third-sector organization like a community volunteer group supporting asylum seekers, Mayblin argues that support rates from the UK government do not cover all essential living needs, and the third sector is filling a significant gap in this area (Mayblin, 2018). This argument leads me to see how these TSOs can use social media to help form motivated groups to support asylum seekers in the U.S., especially in Denver. Using an online platform to connect participants can potentially lead to action, “Engaging a supporter base in this way is good for both the organization, (policies and positions can be promoted, and it is useful for donation seeking and actions) and for social media users (as an easy way to gain information, but also for identity or image management)” (Mckay, 2020). Social media networking usage for refugees helps them bond and support each other while also benefitting social capital. In a separate study, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia were interviewed about their social support and satisfaction with social networks. One migrant, Farhad, was motivated to connect with his neighbors for support and stated in an interview, “Having a good friend, having a good neighbour, can help you to find yourself” (Ziersch et al., 2023). The power and influence that can come from a social media group made up of neighbors willing to help in the community is astounding and shows how social capital through informal groups can still benefit asylum seekers through important interpersonal links. There is a difference in support between the social networks provided for refugees and asylum seekers based on the resources they are offered and the community that helps and funds them. This can be shown in the vast differences between refugees and asylum seekers based on status in access to health, housing, and employment services. Ultimately, informal and formal support groups share a common goal

to benefit the social capital of migrants, but the difference between refugees and asylum seekers depicts the amount and type of social support they have access to.

With formal support groups like the IRC, there has been evidence throughout history showing that the services offered to refugees make a difference. In 2023 alone, the IRC Denver served around 3,000 refugees and not only supported them in the first months of their arrival, but they continue to support them as they integrate into society and serve as a trusted resource in the community (The Denver Foundation, 2023). NGOs for migrant aid are filled with employees and volunteers who have a passion for humanitarian work and view refugees and asylum seekers as humans and can connect with them to create a bond, in which they would not expose personal information about status but rather keep everything private while focusing on the client's needs and success. Although the formation of informal support groups is not formal, the work being done is based on the knowledge of other sources and groups, which provides some structure for the methods of support. Members of the community Facebook groups use their connections to outside resources like legal, health, and employment opportunities, to connect asylum seekers to other groups with more of a specific focus on services. In Denver and many other cities across the U.S., there will continue to be an influx of asylum seekers in the future, but with that, there will continue to be an increase in volunteers to keep supporting and creating informal groups to do their part to help the community.

Overall, migration in the context of Denver highlights the crucial role that both informal and formal support groups play in benefiting the social capital of migrants. As they arrive in Denver, their access to resources and support is determined by their legal status, whether they are a refugee or an asylum seeker. Formal support groups, NGOs like the IRC, have historically supported refugees because of the institutional resources received through the U.S. government

and different grants to take on refugee cases, and used funding to support them in various ways. Compared to social capital being linked to refugees institutionally, asylum seekers are bonded with community volunteers and connected to different groups to receive their support in a more informal way. Community volunteers create Facebook groups to collaborate and offer a more grassroots, immediate form of aid. The differences in support are also exhibited through the sources and levels of funding. The City of Denver has provided funding for some asylum seekers, but the efforts of informal support groups are also necessary to support a larger range of asylum seekers to meet their ever-changing needs while the IRC receives more consistent funding. With Denver investing in programs and resources for asylum seekers, they are able to live and work and become a part of Denver's community, showing that the city will benefit in the long run. This shows that with a difference in support based on status, asylum seekers struggle to assimilate into society without a long-term support system and rely on the necessary informal support groups. The current system for migrant support must be evaluated to ensure that all migrants, regardless of status, receive the level of support and social networks they need to successfully resettle and integrate into the community of Denver.

Chapter 2: Building Trust and Relationships as Foundations of Migrant Support

Creating supportive relationships between migrants and community advocates can occur when there is mutual trust between one another. These relationships place an emphasis on humanizing migrants and setting boundaries for individuals, which leads to mobilizing support. A relationship is built on trust, and when supporting refugees and asylum seekers, trust is important to create a relationship that fosters future support. Trust starts in informal interactions to establish a positive presence. Spending time getting to know migrants who are new to the community can be beneficial in creating a gathering or an event. Trust can be fostered in home visits to create a sense of comfort. Interview data from organizations that are working with refugee families found that checking in regularly with families to understand their current situation helped staff meet critical needs like food, utilities, rent, cleaning supplies, and diapers in real time (MPI, 2022). Managing a client's urgent needs and priorities with programs designed to help them specifically feel supported can build trust between an employee and a refugee family. Meeting migrants where they are most comfortable is a crucial step and can explain why home visits are so beneficial to creating safe spaces to meet. The Migration Policy Institute created 2Gen strategies for building trust, which meant they worked with both parents and children. A mindset of the 2Gen strategies is to design policies and practices for immigrant communities to thrive economically and socially. This includes the emphasis on "designing with" rather than "designing for," so their needs feel recognized and heard, and the practices are designed with migrants as a part of the conversation (MPI, 2022). This collaborative effort of designing practices for immigrants strengthens trust on both sides and can lead to better outcomes of support.

Trust and relationships with migrant support rely on the concept of accountability to efficiently offer support in the field of humanitarian work. Because many actions of support are based on the urgent needs of migrants, agreeing to work to help their needs means holding yourselves and other members of the team accountable. In a study looking at accountability in humanitarian action, they define the three components of accountability as “taking account, which refers to listening and communication, and overlaps with participation and participatory approaches. The second is to give account, which refers to transparency, and then there is the component of responsibility and taking ownership for actions and non-actions to accept credit and blame” (Hilhorst et al., 2021). By focusing on the third component of responsibility for actions, one can understand how being responsible for supporting migrants when it is your duty or something you have committed to as a volunteer is the only way real change and support can occur. The interviews done in the study revealed that ‘informal accountability’ is the practice of everyday accountability for individuals and organizations to live up to their responsibilities. A lack of internal accountability of organizations or groups can fuel a lack of external accountability when interacting with migrants if there is not a common understanding of the trust and responsibilities of volunteers.

Along with responsibility and being held accountable, creating boundaries to sustain healthy relationships between community volunteers/employees and between migrants looking for support is crucial. Boundaries for the support or ways of support between humanitarian workers and migrants benefit both groups and limit the existence of burnout. Burnout is defined as a result of chronic workplace stress that is typically characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Shee Foo et al., 2023). When working to support migrants, there can be a feeling of constant need, so to avoid

burnout and be able to continue to show up for migrant populations, boundaries are necessary. Feeling personal responsibility for migrants as clients can lead to overworking to solve different needs, but it becomes unhealthy and seen as unprofessional. A final component to building relationships and trust in humanitarian work with migrants is cultural competency, described as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Lau & Rodgers, 2021). There are many ways to implement cultural competency in this work, but one important one is to integrate migrant’s culture and language when offering support. Using professional interpreter services or a translator benefits the communication aspect, allowing both sides to fully understand the situation.

In my knowledge and experience of the IRC, relationships and trust between refugee clients, interns, and caseworkers are crucial for efficient and sustainable support in Denver. My first day at the IRC was as nerve-wracking as ever, walking into the office and patiently waiting for the Casework team to show me around. Instantly, I felt welcomed, and the entire casework team, small but mighty, was excited to meet me and work with me throughout the Summer. Refugee resettlement had not been something I had ever done before, but Alice and Marnie, who were previous interns, assured me that it would be simple to learn. As my Casework supervisors, they put their trust in me and sent me out on my first day in the field. In order to build and maintain relationships with clients, I was assigned a consistent client, a single mother named Sonia with six children all under the age of 12.

Marnie informed me that because Sonia had given birth a year ago, and had such young children, the IRC’s focus has not been solely on her, so that’s where my role came in. I drove through the Aurora neighborhood that I knew so well, passing the infamous Tacos y Pupusas

restaurant to reach Sonia's apartment. With the help of Language Line, a live interpretation service paid for by the IRC, I was able to interact with Sonia, who only spoke Swahili, and her kids, who were glued to cartoons on TV when I completed my home visit. As instructed by Marnie, I was just there to get to know Sonia and ask her about her needs. Immediately, she started showing me around the apartment, pointing to the leaking kitchen counter, broken toilets, and a gaping hole in the wall in the bedroom.

My experience could not prepare me to help her directly with these needs, but I assured her that I would write down every detail and be sure to solve the issues. Alice has also promised or assured clients that problems could be solved, but as she explained to me, there is no definite solution to certain issues. "I would say when I work with a client, it's not so much about trust, but, in the long run, I'm just hopeful, and hopeful for them to figure it out. But it's definitely very important for clients to feel comfortable, to report any issues." I was hopeful and determined during that first home visit, and per her request, showed the bus route to the local grocery store, King Soopers. She expressed interest in learning how to take the bus, but as I would soon learn, everything takes a little longer than expected.

Sonia was out of funds on her EBT card that month, so taking the bus would be for another visit later in the week. Home visits humanized and strengthened my relationship with Sonia and encouraged me to work towards solving issues she brought to me, even with my limited experience. The person-to-person contact provides a unique perspective that doesn't even require specifically trained skills. It requires empathy for humans and a willingness to form a bond. The support I was giving Sonia was something that I was "designing with" her, as the 2Gen approach previously mentioned, by creating the practices of support as I continued to visit her on a regular basis.

In one of my earlier interactions with Sonia, I brought her back to King Soopers to pick up her money order for rent and to remind her kids of a summer camp happening the next day. As we talked about my plans to visit her on Friday to get a monthly bus pass, she informed me that a few months ago, a volunteer was sent by the IRC to assist Sonia with taking the bus, but she never showed and reported to her supervisor that she had completed the task. This work, especially as an intern or volunteer, is based on trust and accountability, and unfortunately, when that gets broken, clients miss out on necessary support opportunities. I eventually taught Sonia how to take the bus to King Soopers and even to the IRC office, but I felt frustrated that someone would betray a client's trust and give them false expectations of the support they would be receiving. The informal aspect of accountability is ever present in this work, and without a formal check-in during the home visits, it is up to the volunteers and caseworkers to show up and do the work for the client's well-being.

When I initially heard about Sonia's needs and issues during each home visit, I felt compelled to support her and solve every problem that day. But as I would message Marnie with every new challenge I faced, she would eventually tell me that for those final problems, I could come back and help the next day. Creating boundaries, or a cut-off point just for that day, helps make sure the level and quality of support is beneficial each day. Marnie and Alice have both worked at the IRC for a few years and knew many coworkers who got burnt out and quit because of poor boundaries. Calling it "a disservice to your clients and staff, portrays the role boundaries play in providing refugee support. Barriers were constantly present in tasks that I would complete, and they can prohibit a lot of support actions for refugees, but as Alice would remind me, "Understand that the system is broken, and it's not our fault." She emphasizes reminding

herself and others that this is her job and that we are just a dot on the line of their resettlement journey.

While being that dot on the line, I learned how important it is to support refugees through various services and support them as a human. Using interpretation services to interact with clients was often very straightforward, just to give and receive information from the IRC. It didn't always give me room to get to know a client beyond their names, place of origin, or their pressing needs, which often resulted in limited interactions. Another case worker who occasionally advised me, Miranda, had asked me to visit a new client instead of Sonia that week to create more connections with various clients needing support. The client was a young queer couple from Venezuela who had arrived in the U.S. only a month ago and wanted to start the process of finding jobs. According to Marnie, "We're [IRC Denver] a really great place for LGBTQ refugees. Our headquarters has said that we're one of the few offices they've identified as a hub for refugees who have LGBTQ backgrounds and identities." Their resettlement process already provides them with a state that is perhaps more inclusive and trusting than other states. I felt confident in my Spanish enough not to use the Language Line interpretation services and just make conversation with them as I drove them to an employment office. They told me that they were hoping to find a job nearby with full-time hours, and when asking about their work in Venezuela, one of the women mentioned she would normally work for 12 hours and get paid the equivalent of \$10. The minimum wage in Venezuela previously was 130 Venezuelan bolívars, equivalent to \$30, but in March 2022, it was reduced to \$3.50 (VOA, 2024). This drastic reduction in wages but unchanged prices of basic goods creates an economic crisis and is one motivation for Venezuelans to migrate.

This shocking information stayed with me as I took them to the employment office, where a bilingual worker assisted them as they input information into the system. After they were able to both apply for jobs at McDonald's across the street, I drove them to the library to pick up rented computers. Usually, the language barriers between clients create very silent drives, where I want to get to know them and ask a bit more about their families to create a more friendly environment, but it is difficult. This drive was full of conversation because this couple spoke Spanish, was around the same age as me, and immediately asked me about Denver and how it was growing up in the city. I got to share my favorite parts, while they shared their initial impressions and future goals for their new lives in Denver. This exchange of information is so important to move past the 'formal' work of the job and take some time, even a 20-minute drive, to interact and get to know one another in their native language.

A final part of what makes trusting relationships so important is the idea of cultural sensitivity with choices. As members of the IRC, it is the caseworker's job to assist refugees with their larger and more formal needs, like governmental forms, ID cards, or rent. These are more straightforward without room for a lot of choice, but others like food preferences, religious values or cultural norms allow refugees to choose what is most culturally appropriate for them, while resettling into a brand-new culture.

A family that I frequently visited was a couple, Rafi and Rose, with four young children living in one apartment. In a neighboring apartment, Rafi's mother, Becca, lived with her other two children. This extended family was not from the Republic of Congo like Sonia, but rather the Central African Republic and had been living in refugee camps for most of their lives. Because they have not lived in permanent housing in a while, I helped them with more basic needs as they were resettling, like grocery shopping and making sure the appliances were working correctly.

An assumption that people trying to support refugees may make is that they can shop for food at a regular grocery store. This is true, however asking them their preferences for food, and taking them to a culturally appropriate grocery store helps foster trust and comfort with a client. This extended family had expressed interest in going to an African Market, so I asked Marnie for suggestions and found one nearby. The first store had the vegetables they were looking for, but they preferred fresh as opposed to frozen. I got a recommendation from the shop owner of Mango House, as mentioned previously, who also had an African market. The clients found meats and flour that they liked better, and the women owning the shop spoke the same language as Rafi, French. He repeated a phrase over and over to her, and she knew another shop just down the street that had the fresh squash leaves he was looking for. But, as she couldn't leave the shop, she sent her friend who spoke neither French nor English to lead us to the shop. The final shop had everything the family was looking for and more. Instead of a volunteer just purchasing food that they think this family should be eating, actively working with them to get culturally appropriate and potentially comforting food strengthens relationships and the client's well-being.

The presence of relationships and trust in the community Facebook group is what fosters the success and support given to asylum seekers in Denver. Relationships are formed between community members, asylum seekers, and families around the neighborhood, as well as relationships with other faith-based organizations and others who can provide their services. I met many of the volunteers of the Central Park Facebook group through neighbors on my block. Darcy is an avid poster on the Facebook group and a strong advocate of the work being done by asylum seekers and community volunteers. Since I met Darcy, her drive to help everyone seemed as though she was highly experienced in this field. As my longtime neighbor, I spent time babysitting her kids and always had neighborly interactions, but it wasn't until I was invited to a

birthday party that I had someone who was an integral part of my neighborhood community introducing me to a community that she had built.

Darcy knew I studied Spanish in college and wanted me to come to this event to help translate for the different families she was hosting for a Venezuelan woman's birthday party. She had met them at a hotel shelter nearby and wanted to celebrate her birthday properly. I spoke to the different families and asked them about their kids and their experiences, and in each response, they praised and thanked Darcy for her immense kindness and said she was a blessing to them. Something as simple as a meal and a group gathering like this party had a beneficial impact on these individuals. Darcy is working to provide basic needs, and said she was a blessing to them. Something as simple as a meal and a group gathering like this party had a beneficial impact on these individuals. Darcy is working to provide basic needs, but also understands the need to strengthen relationships and community bonds between Venezuelan asylum seekers and Denver neighbors. She had no connections to any other formal organization and described that she "is just helping because she sees the need and wants to be helpful." I asked why she had not been involved with nonprofits to continue this work on a larger scale, but "I have a personal connection to the people that I work with, and it motivates me to keep working with them." Darcy has been working with a group of families consistently since 2022 to support them in as many ways as possible, especially with employment opportunities based on their unique talents as she got to know them.

"Once we started working with the specific group, there were just so many interesting life stories. Like, there was a professional boxer, a graffiti and tattoo muralist, a rapper. And so getting to know them more outside of their work and their asylum-seeking and everything, and just, like, realizing that they're really similar to my friends. And so that was really cool. And just not something I expected."

To humanize individuals is the process of recognizing and respecting their human qualities and treating them as part of a common moral community, and after talking with these volunteers, the action of humanizing migrants was a crucial step in creating a space of support. By understanding someone beyond just their basic needs or even their status, we can create a relationship that becomes a part of supporting asylum seekers' needs. Darcy started learning Spanish to ask them more about themselves, to understand them and their interests. Relationships also create a bond of trust between volunteers like Darcy and asylum seekers, which is necessary to start the support process.

Specifically with employment opportunities, trust or a lack of it shapes the ways asylum seekers can provide for their families. As asylum seekers arrive in Denver, they can apply for asylum status and can request an initial work permit 150 days after submitting their asylum application (Form I-589). Asylum seekers can receive a work permit 180 days after filing their asylum applications (Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, 2024). During this waiting period before being permitted to work, members of groups like the Central Park Facebook page can communicate with asylum seekers to understand what work they can and are willing to do, and the volunteer becomes an advocate for them. Darcy had spoken with other members of the group and general members of her community receiving the services and expressed, “People would prefer to work with somebody that they know is being vouched for instead of somebody that's just reaching out to try to get, like, a one-off job.” She has posted flyers and images of previous car detailing or landscaping work and attached her name along with the post, explaining that she will vouch for them and trusts their work. Distrust becomes a barrier to employment when assumptions are made about asylum seekers and their level of work, which causes them to be turned away by community members or paid unfair wages that don't reflect the work they have

done. Jo, another neighbor on my block, also expressed the concept of trust specifically with posts on the Facebook group page.

The Central Park Newcomers Facebook Group originally was for volunteers to communicate about support for the influx of migrants in Denver. Later, the admin and moderators of the group decided to open the group to the asylum seekers themselves and translate their questions or needs so that asylum seekers could comment and help each other based on previous knowledge, or volunteers in the group could directly help. Jo saw this openness as beneficial, but also something that could create barriers.

“There's a level of trust, too, because you don't know all the people on it. And then it's just hard, there has to be a decision if the newcomers could also post, and when that happens it gets tricky because of translations and language barriers. How do we keep it organized with needs? Also, with newcomers we already work with, there's a level of trust, and we know their work and we know how they operate when they're with somebody's car and somebody's home. So, we can say they're hardworking and trustworthy because we've built a relationship.”

Jo has a similar background and introduction to this work as Darcy. She became the main home for a clothing drop-off where she organized clothes and shoes by size so she could connect with families and donate any clothing for the Winter. Jo has described to me her passion for volunteering and the role it plays in her life. She primarily volunteers for food waste non-profits, but just like Darcy, because she's a mother, she saw the humanitarian need of these children and families and wanted to help out. Darcy and Jo as neighbors, used their common goal to both support the same few families and hone in on their various needs. They expressed a bond between each other, as well as a bond between the families they were supporting, showing that the relationships blossomed between volunteers can be integral in how this informal support group is able to operate.

I believe that the way the Denver community volunteers viewed immigration terminology was one of the most important ways of humanizing individuals. When asked who the group

primarily supported, Jo used the term ‘newcomers’. For my research, I was curious about which population, refugee or asylum seeker, the Facebook group was supporting, but the word ‘newcomers’ was popularly used in the volunteer interviews. Many individuals started switching from using the word migrant to newcomers as it is more humanizing and expresses a population that is not constantly on the move but is newly arriving in a community. The Denverite, CPR News, and KRCC moved away from the term migrants in new coverage and instead are using new immigrants. “The term new immigrants remain accurate when describing this population - the vast majority of the people we have met over the past year and a half say they plan to remain in the U.S., be it Denver, somewhere else in Colorado, or another state” (Manuel, 2024). Darcy and Jo were unaware of any terminology specific to those they were helping, as many of the other volunteers of the Facebook group were as well. Jo said the terminology was confusing to her, but she knew that many recent Venezuelans were looking for asylum. But what really stood out and showed the unique role of this group was that she said they do not differentiate between them; they know they need help because they were just humans in need. As I asked about terminology and who is being helped in this group, Darcy told me a story about one of the Venezuelans she was working with who needed to see the doctor, but there were limited options for asylum seekers receiving medical care. In Denver, an organization called Mango House is a shared space for refugees and asylees with access to healthcare, stores, religious gatherings, services, and restaurants. Darcy took him to Mango House, and when they asked if he was a refugee, she replied yes, but when the doctor requested his official status, she soon realized the limits for benefits placed on these individuals based on status. The lack of focus on immigration terminology creates a more open-minded and humanistic community that strives to help even when institutional barriers are blocking out support for only refugees or asylees.

For informal groups, volunteers like Jo and Darcy, who are building real humanistic relationships with asylum seekers as well as other volunteers in the group, a sense of trust is formed, and the combination between the two is what forms a community capable of working towards their common goals together. Although the needs seemed endless and overwhelming in the first few months, Darcy understood that boundaries needed to be set individually in this work. Across the interviews, the consistent idea was that the Facebook group allowed people to pick and choose how they supported asylum seekers and how often. While this method benefits some, it places a disproportionate burden on certain members. As an active volunteer, Darcy understood the importance of setting boundaries in informal support work. “There has to be boundaries, because it's a lot. There's a lot of need all the time, so that makes sense that the group can split up different things.” To keep up with the needs and ensure support for migrants can continue to be offered, creating boundaries with migrants is important. Building relationships that have healthy boundaries and trust creates sustainable social networks of support amongst volunteers and migrants.

As shown through the experiences of home visits with IRC clients as well as the interactions volunteers of the Facebook group were having with migrant families, there is a clear message that mutually trusting relationships between migrants and advocates are important to do this work and support clients in various ways. These groups can function more efficiently when there are more face-to-face interactions where migrants feel trusted and more humanized as they open up to the volunteers and express their needs, as well as share their stories. With volunteers like Darcy, who were able to consistently help specific families, these relationships become crucial for gaining employment opportunities and other resources down the line. The Casework

team also has this opportunity to conduct home visits to meet the client where they are at and be available and empathetic to support their needs as much as possible.

Chapter 3: Creating Community in a Digital Age: The Role of (Social) Media in Migrant Support

Social media groups like Facebook help uniquely form a community dedicated to providing support for asylum seekers. Traditional media is also essential in creating awareness and providing correct information about the influx of migrants to Denver. Social media in general is a way to connect with individuals, and in this case, connect with migrants. Lecheler et al. observed that most people have little to no direct contact with migration in their daily lives, and therefore, social media can provide a link to connect migrants with those of a host society (Lecheler et al., 2019). Using an online platform to connect participants can potentially lead to action, “Engaging a supporter base in this way is good for both the organization, (policies and positions can be promoted, and it is useful for donation seeking and actions) and for social media users (as an easy way to gain information, but also for identity or image management)” (Mckay, 2020). Social media networking usage for refugees helps them bond and support each other while also bridging social capital. 55% of asylum-seeking participants acknowledged that social media makes their asylum-related life easier when asked about its role in migration journeys (Merisolo, 2020). Sharing information as they travel or creating connections in a host society, contributes to the importance of social media as a tool for all migrants. In the example of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, access to online communication created a ‘collective intelligence,’ where citizens all over collaborated to support each other (Starbird, 2013). Being able to self-organize and exchange information is crucial to support asylum seekers, and using the different areas of knowledge citizens have creates a perfect blend of collective intelligence.

Although social media groups have a unique role and way of functioning that is important for migrants receiving support, there are downsides to the informal nature of the platform.

Misinformation or misrepresented situations are common on social media because of the freedom to post almost anything. Migrants entering Europe seek out information about the journey and destination, and when asked about the accuracy of the information on social media, only 25% received information that was “mostly correct, a lot of valuable, accurate information” (Bokert et al., 2018). Because of common misinformation or skewed perceptions of social media posts, digital literacy is necessary to understand what information is legitimate and who is working to support migrants. Bokert et al., describe members of social media groups as both consumers and producers of digital content and communication, so therefore both migrants and community volunteers must be focused on promoting correct information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRC used Facebook to contact asylum seekers with information about essential services, answer questions from users, and eliminate misinformation about COVID-19 (IRC, 2020). In unprecedented times with so much unknown, the IRC created Facebook posts using simple terms to explain accurate information and reach many more populations when meeting in person was limited. Other humanitarian NGOs found social media forms like Twitter to be extremely helpful in contributing to the mission of providing support and advocacy for refugee communities. Social media allows the discourse to be unfiltered and be used for promoting, training, fundraising, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving online in a faster way (Dimitrova et al., 2022).

Along with social media platforms, traditional media plays a big role in creating community and how local groups mobilize to produce spaces of support. The news media helps to spread information about current events and bring attention to causes like migrant populations in need of support. It plays an important role in shaping public opinion about migrants and the moral responsibilities of the countries that they travel to. Ozola-Schade & Wolling looked at the

effects of media priming on immigration attitudes, and their results showed that higher media coverage is generally associated with positive immigration attitudes across all political orientations (Ozola-Schade & Wolling, 2024). Using media to educate individuals accurately can promote more accepting views on immigration, especially those resettling into their community. Many of the discriminatory views of migrants stem from a lack of education or misinformation. Danilova states that individuals start blaming migrants for ‘stealing’ jobs because they are poorly informed about migrants and easily manipulated by traditional media from far-right politicians. This perpetuates the act of seeing migrants as ‘others’ and can create a divide in society (Danilova, 2014). A relevant example of this is social media posts falsely claiming that a Venezuelan gang had taken over an apartment complex in Aurora, Colorado, which spread in many pro-Trump communities. NBC News reporter Nicole Acevedo explained how these claims have been refuted by local officials, but the rumors spread and became viral on social media, even amplified by Trump during his rallies. (NBC, 2024). A Venezuelan man living in that complex expressed, “Right now, I am scared because of what’s been created, and all the xenophobia and hate that has increased towards us.” False information can be created and spread by anyone, and can create real impacts like the stereotyping of migrants. Social and traditional media are necessary to inform citizens about migration and can create unique communities to help support and promote the integration of migrants into society. If used correctly, citizens and migrants can collaborate to receive accurate and beneficial information, which in turn creates a change-making community.

Facebook is a form of social media that allows individuals to connect with one another, see life updates, and post photos and videos. It is not the most popular form of social media for someone a part of my generation, but its unique feature of creating private groups was very

appealing for the volunteers. Specifically, groups that contain like-minded individuals who can share information and work towards a common goal. The Facebook group, “Central Park & Park Hill - Newcomer (Migrant) Support,” was created on November 13th, 2023, by neighborhood community members to address the influx of Venezuelan migrants entering Denver. With now over 5,000 members of the group, admins and moderators accepted requests of people who had the intention of helping in the group, or as the group evolved, migrants themselves looked to put in requests or connect with volunteers. As Lecheler et al. observed, most people have little to no direct contact with migration in their daily lives, and therefore, social media can provide a link to connect migrants with those of a host society (Lecheler et al., 2019). Once someone is accepted into the group described simply as “NE Denverites organizing mutual aid to support newly arrived migrants,” they are directed to the Welcome Document, which details commonly asked questions, links to helpful spreadsheets, ways you can donate, advocate, volunteer, and more. They note that they are not a nonprofit or official organization, so the admins/moderators do not have any authority over or responsibility for the connections made and actions taken by members of the group. The informality of this social media group is extremely important, but it can also create harm or put up barriers to support. The volunteers I had the pleasure of interviewing were all founding members or had joined very soon after. Jo, who initially showed me the group, described the early community and how she became a part of the group.

“I knew how much affluence is in our neighborhood and how we can tap into ways to work together as a community especially initially with those basic needs. It was November of 2023, and I started hearing media reports of how many Venezuelans were landing in Denver with very little in the winter situation. I realized that the hotels and shelters were really close to my home, so I started seeing posts in local Facebook groups and attended an event, a Thanksgiving event that ended up not really being for the immigrants. But we met people there that were getting involved and helping the Venezuelans.”

Jo initially used the neighborhood and the proximity of the situation to her to act locally in an in-person event. She brought me along with her to a motel temporarily housing those in need, who maybe weren't immigrants but were unhoused and needed a hot meal and clothing. Jo and I helped pass out bags of supplies with other volunteers who informed her of the Facebook group and how important it is to help the migrants out in any way possible. "From November to February, it was so urgent, and people were very aware, so it was easy to get their attention and to ask for things, and if they had them, they would get them to us. Facebook was an easy way for people to plug in and help and spend as much time as they were capable of." The speed of information that social media can provide became an amazing factor for early volunteers of the group, learning from each other and starting to gather and disperse basic needs. Social media allows the discourse to be unfiltered and be used for promoting, training, fundraising, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving online in a faster way (Dimitrova et al., 2022). Jo recalls that one of the first ways she started to help was to create a post offering to be a drop-off point for winter clothes. Despite their urge to help, some people simply didn't have the time in their busy schedules. Jo explains that community members were able to go through their clothes and shoes, drive them over to her house, and drop them off where she had the time to sort them. Both steps might be overwhelming for one person, but by splitting the work and taking on different roles, Venezuelan migrants staying in the shelters were able to receive winter clothes from many members of the group. Darcy labels this as "finding your own niche." Darcy was another early member of the group who learned about the work the group was doing from Jo, her neighbor. Jo had met a group of migrants who were interested in getting any work they could. Darcy needed a yard cleanup project and provided the materials for it to be completed. She saw how hard they worked to make sure her yard was cleaned up perfectly, and she wanted to help them and others

get the work that they deserved. To her, even just being a member of the Facebook group allows so much more to be done. Simply joining the group makes someone automatically a part of the network, where they can help answer questions or direct posts to someone else who may know how to help better. It becomes much more far-reaching and is still a way to get involved, where you can do as much as you can to improve the situation.

Although most of the interactions took place over social media, the in-person events organized through Facebook were some of the most meaningful. Creating events where larger groups of migrants could work together to generate income became not only efficient but also an event that brought the entire community together. Jo and Darcy had put on a Winter car detailing event set up at Montview Presbyterian Church for migrants to clean and detail community members' cars for cash. I had seen a post advertising a summer event like this one and planned to meet Jo there to help run the check-in station. A Sign-Up Genius was posted, which allowed individuals to select their time slot, services, and receive all the necessary information. I arrived at the church parking lot early in the morning on a blistering Colorado summer day. Members of this church had gotten connected to the Facebook group and, upon hearing of the event, kindly offered their space and support to put it on. I walked down to the basement, where church members were taking payments and serving refreshments for clients who were having their cars detailed. My station was a folding table set up outside the church where I handed out fliers for migrants to further promote their services and brought water and watermelon to the migrants while they worked. The group was around 12 men who had been advocated for by members of the Facebook group, bringing them to this event. The day was filled with clients every hour and fueled by homemade turkey sandwiches from volunteers and ice-cold Coca-Colas. Many of the people waiting for their cars sat next to me in lawn chairs, so I curiously asked them about how

they found out about this event. Many were active members of the Facebook group who frequently came to events, some were friends or family members of those individuals, and others were part of the Montview Presbyterian Church, where this event had been promoted on the weekly email sent out to church members. For events like these, social media is crucial and is what mobilizes the group to lead to action and create recurring events solely for the benefit of migrants. It isn't always perfect, with clients showing up late to their timeslots and being short-staffed because some workers took different jobs that day. Creating and promoting an event through social media that holds a common goal allows people to help in the ways that they can, whether that be getting their car detailed or just further promoting the event to others. In all the informality of the way this Facebook group functions, events create a more formal structure where the impact can be seen in person. It is interesting how often these events must be marketed and promoted to include the reason behind the car detailing the event, specifying that it is Venezuelan asylum seekers seeking employment opportunities in order to draw in more clients who are supporting the cause, but perhaps only because of the marketing. Overall, creating in-person events on Facebook takes the role of social media and takes the support solutions completely off-screen.

In discussing the format of social media and the way people are mobilizing to support, Tasha, another volunteer I interviewed, brought up traditional media's effect, "I think throughout this experience, I've been really weary of the press, to be honest." (Tasha) Although Ozola-Schade & Wolling's results showed that higher media coverage is generally associated with positive immigration attitudes across all political orientations (Ozola-Schade & Wolling, 2024), Tasha felt that the media was filtering out important stories and information about migrants in Denver. Tasha had a unique position as she started her own Facebook page focusing on the

Western Inn, a Denver motel being used to house migrants and provide basic needs. As Tracy recalls, a woman had gone to a nearby 7-11 to buy a Red Bull and noticed there were Latino boys being hassled by the manager for asking to use the bathroom. They expressed they were living on the streets, and she found around 80 others living behind this 7-11. She went to the nearby Western Inn, which Ryan Beaty of the Denverite can describe as “a run-down motel that became an accidental sanctuary.” The owner agreed to take them in, and it became a sanctuary for many more migrants to stay and be cared for by volunteers and donations. This story became twisted as things at the Western Inn evolved over the few months after it started housing migrants.

“A lot of us as advocates just had no idea what was really going on until the end.” Tasha expressed as she reflected on this distressing time. She had read articles from sources like Le Monde, which had stretched the truth about what was really happening in the motel. They focused on negative aspects, some news reports even accused Tasha and other advocates of stealing the owner’s money that they raised, even though they had never taken a dime.

Jake also detailed his experience with the media generalizing and discriminating against migrants.

“We saw this massive need way beyond what was being presented on the news and very differently than what was presented on the media because the media was everything. It's negative. And they were saying they're all bad people, and they're all gang members, and, you know, they're breaking the law.”

Jake is referring to the social media posts falsely claiming that a Venezuelan gang had taken over an apartment complex in Aurora, Colorado, which spread in many pro-Trump communities.

False social media posts caused media outlets to start looking into the validity of information, and the claims have been refuted by local officials as well as Venezuelan residents living in the buildings. But as Jake states, the media is everything, and even with these claims being proven

false, the narrative unfortunately shifts away from the migrant's true experiences and into the hands of Trump and right-wing groups. The political implications of these reports were very strong, with individuals calling for mass deportations of new migrants because they believed these false stories (Harris, 2024). People, especially governmental actors, who are not directly involved and only receive information from the media, base their decisions solely on assumptions.

“We are way more involved and know so much more than they do. They've never set foot in moving a family from one place to another. From a shelter to an apartment or, you know, when we were doing, like, the food drives, they didn't do any of that stuff, all the volunteers did that stuff.” Janet's quote displays how traditional media undermines the work being done by volunteers, and when government officials aren't on the ground interacting with migrants and volunteers, they get a false sense of the situation at hand. It is extremely important for accurate media sources that highlight good work being done, rather than all negative. A positive media source that Tasha continuously praised was the *Denverite*.

“Whenever we asked them, they followed us, and they were very cool. Kevin Beaty would ask if they could take pictures of migrants, we were interviewing. We'll show a clip of from the news and we'll put it on our Facebook pages, and then we'll have to let other people interpret it and they might come back and really root for the underdog.”

What Tasha highlighted about the function of social media is how it can humanize the situation and get people to care or ‘root for the underdog.’ I had the pleasure of meeting Kevin Beaty, writer and reporter for the *Denverite*, when Jo and Darcy coordinated a nail salon party where the Venezuelan women she was working with could provide their services to many women in the community. Jo hosted this event at her house, she and Darcy helped provide some nail salon materials and spread the word through the Facebook page, bringing asylum seekers a place to work and community members looking for a way to support. Jo had seen Kevin's other articles

detailing aspects of the influx of asylum seekers in Denver and brought him to this event to cover it for an article. As many migrants may be cautious about interviewing for a new article because of their vulnerable position and fear of being depicted in a negative light, this was a perfect use of the media centering migrants' voices to promote migrant support. As Tasha mentioned, she always wants to avoid her dominance as an outsider, especially as a white woman. While I was getting my acrylic manicure, Kevin politely asked permission to interview and include the name of the woman doing my nails, ensuring mutual trust in this interaction. When Kevin asked about the reasoning behind being a part of this event, Fraiberlys replied, "I'm doing it because I like it, I'm passionate about it, and to generate money to rent an apartment, I thank the people who have helped us." Someday, once she's moved out of the city-run motel where she's been staying with her two children, she dreams of opening her own salon (Beaty, 2024). Focusing on the larger implications of this nail event allowed it to bring attention to Denver residents to understand the situation in a powerful yet simple way.

Using social and traditional media to mobilize and create spaces of support is still prevalent for NGOs like the IRC, but it mobilizes support for refugees in different ways than Facebook groups. For NGOs, traditional media is crucial to inform others, especially refugees, about the work they are doing and to have the name of the organization become recognized.

When asked about the strengths of the IRC, Marnie mentioned the name recognition of the IRC.

"It helps a lot. People know the IRC. We work in refugee camps across the world, so a lot of times clients are familiar with us because we are the ones that help to process them overseas." (Marnie) Name recognition from media promotion, in general, helps clients get connected to IRC's services for refugee resettlement when they reach the U.S. The name recognition of IRC is also helpful for people looking to get involved as a volunteer or employee.

In my experience, looking to intern at a refugee resettlement organization, the IRC was what came up first because they had a well-known office in Denver that had open positions. The IRC also creates its own news posts that provide information about the actions of the IRC, as well as highlighting world issues with refugees across the world.

Social media is not the backbone of refugee resettlement NGOs, but rather, it is a way to spread the word rapidly, especially when policies change, and information is needed to reach refugees and advocates. In my time working at the IRC, things were constantly changing from day to day, and after speaking with my fellow employees, this was common. “I’ve seen a lot of changes in policy, so I’d say our biggest strength is that we keep moving forward. Whatever the decision might be, we keep supporting our clients in ways we can.” Alice referenced the detrimental effects of the 2017 Trump Administration on refugee resettlement and refugee safety in the United States. During his first week in office, President Trump created a travel ban that suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program for 120 days and banned Syrian refugees from entry to the U.S. indefinitely (IRC, 2017). As these administrative decisions were being implemented, refugee resettlement in general became limited, and in turn, the IRC caseworkers were negatively impacted. Although policies had changed for the worse, their actions and support could not change. Social media was used at this time to create a call to action and display the mission of IRC. The IRC posted for individuals to use Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to call on world leaders and use the hashtag #RefugeesWelcome, and by writing or calling elected officials in the U.S to advocate for refugees getting the right to settle in America (IRC, 2017). In this way, social media was used to mobilize action from community members across the U.S. to advocate for expanding their community to include refugees.

Even if they weren't extremely active in the groups, one of the caseworkers I interviewed detailed her involvement in community volunteer Facebook groups. "I'm part of a couple Facebook groups to support migrants, refugees, and other newcomers as community groups. But honestly, most of my time kind of goes to my job at IRC. I don't have much time to volunteer outside of that." (Marnie) Being a member of these groups provides Marnie and other individuals with information about what is being done and the needs of displaced individuals in Denver. Although most of her time is spent supporting refugees as a career at the IRC, using social media to inform herself and her IRC team of the work being done to support other populations, like asylum seekers, is necessary. The IRC caseworkers and the volunteers of the Facebook group have similar goals and can learn from each other through a simple connection on social media.

Similarly, in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the IRC was extremely limited in the in-person refugee support they could provide but could deliver critical information digitally to those affected by crises. This was done through the platform Signpost, initially created in 2015 by the IRC, but it was an essential solution while navigating pandemic times. Signpost is "a service that delivers critical information through a network of social media channels and websites that deliver information products and enable two-way communication, providing communities with timely and actionable information to make critical decisions on issues" (Signpost, 2023). It can tailor services to specific populations and locations, but was used in 2020 to provide users with reliable information on COVID-19 preventative measures and safety guidelines. NGOs like the IRC tend to use social media to fight back against restrictive policies, dispel misinformation, and more efficiently deliver information to refugees.

Traditional media, like the press releases consistently updated on the IRC website, also help spread accurate information about crises and the impact IRC is making. There are specific

pages for each city's office showing the positive impacts being made. Data points like “35,000 people in the U.S. received asylum and protection support this year” and “2,697 people were assisted to become new U.S. citizens” backed up the IRC’s efforts with real results, from this past year, promoting trust in the organization. This defines the group as a more formalized institution that can include what services are offered in each location, with direct evidence of how these services are implemented to serve refugees. In interviews and on the website, it is very clear that the goals stay the same despite policies changing, and press releases will continue to promote the IRC and how to continue to make a difference.

One of the roles of media for NGOs like the IRC is to source funding to provide services and take on more caseloads. On every page of the website, there is a button to donate directly to the IRC, and this need for donations is amplified through social media posts, email blasts, or events like fundraisers. Although funding is primarily from the U.S. government and larger donors, it is important to continue to raise money so that as many refugees as possible can be supported per office. The IRC’s Open Information Policy is a page on the website detailing its commitment to transparency of who is funding and what exactly is being funded. This is another important way of using media to source funding, but also being open and honest about partners, donors, and clients. This funding also goes into paying employees at the IRC and resources used to create volunteer or intern positions, just like the one I participated in. As members of the Casework team mentioned, the caseload can often be overwhelming, which was a shared feeling in other IRC teams in education, legal, or employment. Promoting these positions uses different forms of media to reach other communities and find those who are most qualified, while volunteers might be found within the Denver community.

Social media, as well as traditional media, play a large role in creating spaces of support for migrants through community organizations. Because the Facebook group is based on a social media platform, it plays a crucial role in facilitating connections with volunteers and migrants. Volunteers can “find their niche,” as Darcy states, and help by posting donations, helping source employment opportunities like the car detailing event, or something as simple as answering questions posted in the group. Traditional media helps promote the work that is being done and uplifts these informal groups, but when it is biased or inaccurate, migrants can be perceived in a negative light. For more formal groups like the IRC, social media is prevalent but not the backbone of the support group. Using platforms like Signpost to spread quick information can be extremely beneficial, but traditional media plays a larger role for this organization. Recognition of the IRC’s name helps attract clients because they are familiar with an established organization, and traditional media like the IRC’s press releases help spread accurate information about crises and the impact the IRC is making. Both forms of media in both types of groups provide an efficient way of communicating and sharing information. Once spaces of support are established online, we can take things offline and support migrants face-to-face.

Chapter 4: Connecting to Resources: The Timeline of Support Systems

Community support groups are able to connect to different resources or groups that can provide resources such as legal asylum support or permanent housing. Shifts are highlighted between urgent needs and long-term sustainability as they move along the support timeline. Funding also differs with short and long-term needs, but funds are necessary in general to continue supporting migrants in the community. Looking at the general community support for migrants in the U.S., support organizations provide direct services or referrals to other groups. The most frequently provided services based on survey data were immigration legal services, social assistance, and housing assistance (American Immigration Council, 2021). To connect migrants to these systems or help provide them, social networks of volunteers are necessary. Physical, financial, and human resources make up the principles of community engagement to facilitate refugee integration. Individuals may have special skills or knowledge that a certain agency does not have, and they can devote additional time and one-on-one interactions to a specific concern of migrants. Financial and physical resources are important to initially help migrants upon arrival, like clothing donations, and help with rent or temporary housing (Fratzke & Dorst, 2019).

Often, to get connected to these resources, migrants must become connected with someone who can serve as an ‘advocate’ for them. Kaur et al. found, “Refugees who sought a culturally familiar, community advocates were able to increase their social capital, which is recognized as the network of social relations that can provide people and groups with access to resources and support” (Kaur et al., 2021). Community advocates, either volunteers or caseworkers, serve as a necessary bridge to help provide resources for migrants.

Many of these organizations that provide the resources require much more funding to serve migrant populations. Often, the funding of services is only offered to migrants based on status, either refugee or asylum seeker. When looking at healthcare access for migrants as a resource, there becomes a clear divide in accessibility between refugees and asylum seekers. Unlike refugees, asylum seekers in the U.S. do not have access to services such as Refugee Medical Assistance, time-limited cash assistance, or employment opportunities. Even though refugees have access to these services, there are still barriers like confusion around health insurance, hospital locations, and a lack of interpretation services (Zeidan et al., 2019). Asylum seekers may rely on community-based migrant-serving organizations (MSOs) to either provide direct services to those who are ineligible for government programs, asylum seekers, or serve as healthcare navigators to help immigrants access services for which they are eligible, often those with refugee status (Cravero et al., 2024).

The populations and resources that an organization can provide also depend on its size and how formal and structured it is. Cravero et al. found that smaller organizations reported offering more day-to-day “survival” assistance while larger organizations reported greater involvement in areas related to education and employment (Cravero et al., 2024). Additionally, a migrant’s legal status significantly impacts the types of jobs they can access. Asylum seekers do not receive a work permit and therefore cannot be formally employed. As a result of this, they face inequity in the labor force, which “involves practices such as the withholding of wages, the threat of denunciation to authorities, debt bondage, or excessive working hours” (Waite, 2017). For those with refugee status, they have both informal and formal employment relationships, with more traditional jobs having a formal employer, and informal employment doing inconsistent work with little verbal agreements from informal employers (Waite, 2017). The

difference in formality greatly affects wages and work conditions for migrants, especially asylum seekers who are limited to only informal jobs. They are also more likely to be exploited or not paid at all, with employers knowing they have no recourse.

It's important to look at the support timeline for migrants, specifically the sustainability of funding and resources. Civil society organizations (CSOs), mainly volunteer groups or NGOs, work to fill the gap between healthcare access and humanitarian services. However, for financial stability, these CSOs rely on donations or temporary contracts that can only fund services in the short term and are not sustainable over time (Piccoli & Perna, 2024). This lack of sustainability contributes to resources being limited, and members of CSOs are forced to be selective with who receives resources first, playing into the hierarchies of deservingness as mentioned previously (Piccoli & Perna, 2024). For future solutions to creating sustainable support through accessible resources for migrants, self-sustainable funding must be consistently available. With migrants of different statuses, "There is a lot of funding from the county, from the state, from the city to refugees and asylees, but there is no funding to provide services to immigrant communities regardless of statuses" (Kirsch, 2023). It is crucial to connect migrants to different resources, gain sustainable funding, and utilize all social networks to fully support this population.

Although volunteers and employees work to support migrants, often there are groups of people or specific individuals who are seen as more 'deserving' of help than others and inequality becomes prevalent in the levels of support received. The social science concept of deservingness highlights "the ways in which assumptions about whose health deserves attention and care influence every aspect of healthcare provision" (Holmes et al., 2021). This is rooted more in the healthcare context but acknowledges how assumptions about deservingness influence the different aspects of support. Looking beyond labels like asylum seekers and

refugees, deservingness can be ascribed to those of a certain age, gender, or race. When children are seen as ‘morally innocent,’ it “reinforces a hierarchical distribution of humanitarian concern based on victimhood,” which is very concerning for volunteers supposedly working with all migrants to offer support (Yarris, 2020). Hierarchies of deservingness exist within subgroups based on their status, limiting many from employment opportunities or formal support.

Specifically in 1990s Britain, new restrictions on social support for asylum seekers caused a restructuring of welfare and thus excluded asylum seekers and deemed them ‘undeserving’ (Sales, 2002). Refugees were experiencing cases of social exclusion but were able to gain employment opportunities in Britain, while asylum seekers were lacking support and becoming the topic of racist discourse. Volunteers oftentimes contribute to the divide of deservingness when having moral and emotional dilemmas about helping. They may start helping people, but realize they are not fully deserving of their compassion because they confirm negative stereotypes, which are problematic because a judgment is clouding the initial goal of providing support. Although many volunteers in informal support groups are still providing beneficial support to refugees and asylum seekers, it is important to critique judgmental behaviors to make sure deservingness is not a deciding factor in support efforts. Deservingness also needs to be examined in the creation of policies for refugees and asylum seekers to understand how equal formal support from governments and NGOs can be implemented for both groups.

Mentioned over 20 times, the term “resources” was one of the terms most used when interviewing local community Facebook group volunteers. Jo summarized it well when asked about the strengths of this group. “We have resources, we have time, and we have ways to help them.” The most unique and impactful aspect of this group was how they connected migrants with resources or groups that could provide those resources to ensure they were receiving a

holistic form of support. As Fratzke & Dorst explain, financial and physical resources are crucial when initially helping migrants upon arrival, like clothing donations and help with rent or temporary housing (Fratzke & Dorst, 2019). Jo recalled the countless bags of clothing donations she sorted and brought to different families of migrants staying in nearby shelters. Each time Jo or one of the other volunteers went, they would be sure to ask each individual what immediate needs they had. On numerous occasions, volunteers would make a list, and Jo would send me to Goodwill to find things like suitcases, women's sneakers, or sweatpants. Because of the influx of migrants in need in 2023, a spreadsheet called the Migrant Outreach Directory was created where volunteers from the Facebook group could edit and put what each family needed immediately after arriving. Once this became more organized, it turned into a tab titled "Support a Family Program." This broke up the work by connecting each volunteer to one or two families to provide them with basic needs. This included shoes, winter coats, and hygiene kits, but often, it just said, "New to Denver, needs everything?" In an informal group, these semi-formal spreadsheets help temporarily keep things in order and split the work across volunteers, ensuring more families can get support. As shown in this spreadsheet and across the interviews, there was a timeline of needs that shifted from the Fall of 2023 until the present day. Of course, there wasn't a formal timeline; every person had different needs at different times, but as I closely monitored the posts of the group, there seemed to be a general timeline of support. After the distribution of basic needs to those on the streets and those in shelters, volunteers helped to get everyone into a shelter and sponsored a family to bring them what they needed at the shelters.

Unfortunately, there were barriers in this process. Volunteers posted on Facebook about one shelter, the Microtel Inn, a shelter that essentially limited volunteers to bringing any food or donations to migrants inside. One of the posts details how the employees working there refused

donations, saying that the migrants have everything they need, and they are supplying it. However, volunteers could visually see the needs of these families; they needed food, clothes, and hygiene kits, but weren't able to donate anything because of the employees' rules. In the post, the volunteer wrote, "It is obvious that some people are not aware of the severity of the situation. Unfortunately, the employees that are there to 'help' these families are not really helping. Not only that, but they are not willing to partner up with the community that is willing to help." At the Comfort Inn, a similar shelter nearby, the situation had escalated with employees raiding rooms to take the food away from migrant families. This heartbreaking situation was posted about many times, with snacks being taken away from children and meals paid for with hard-earned money being stolen without any explanation.

Another volunteer whose family she was helping or "adopting" reported the same situation happening to them, so to provide young children with the food they needed, she used suitcases with discreet zippers and hid snacks and other supplies so employees would let them in. These shelters provided by the city of Denver as temporary housing resources were somehow limiting other essential resources that families need to survive, causing volunteers to find alternative ways around these unfair barriers. The shelters and other resources provided by Denver eventually depleted, as Jo mentioned, "With Denver, the mayor did as much as he could with limited resources, but it really was a lot of these Facebook groups that did the heavy lifting." The resources in Denver were tapped out with all shelters full, and the volunteers had to step up. As mentioned before, the Western Motor Inn and other shelters had to be opened to keep migrants off the street and offer temporary housing. However, after 37 days, families had to vacate the shelters, which led to volunteers working together to source more permanent housing options like apartments.

Out of the volunteers that I interviewed, Darcy seemed to have the most experience sourcing work opportunities for the families she was supporting, as well as “advocating” for. As Kaur et al. discusses, it is a way to increase social capital and support. “The biggest thing that I do is sourcing work opportunities daily since the first week of December, and I do it all informally on Facebook groups.” (Darcy) Sourcing these work opportunities became a little bit more complicated than donation events, but as Jo described, volunteers were willing to evolve based on the timeline of needs. “When it became less easy to help, like now they need jobs, and at some point, we said, now people need a place to live. Volunteers would ask, ‘Can they use your basement?’ ‘Can you rent out your carriage house?’ Well, that's a whole different question. So those things changed, and then people that wanted to help change, too.”

The most popular form for getting the word out about employment opportunities was to create a post detailing the services that a group or individual was offering, usually with photos of past work, like yard work, car detailing, or nail art. The migrants would also provide contact information along the lines of “advocating.” They usually had the name of a volunteer from the group who could advocate for them, saying that they were reliable workers and had been in the past. Another way this could be done was to have volunteers posting for work that they needed to do, such as shoveling snow, detailing cars, or other jobs where they wanted to support migrants. Because they do not have asylee status or refugee status, they are unable to receive employment services, so this was a great way to provide them with employment resources. These employment barriers can be an example of an institutional dimension of deservingness. Undocumented migrants are seen as “undeserving” of employment because they are not recognized legally to have access to employment opportunities. As Waite detailed, this population of people faced great inequity in the workforce, especially with the withholding of wages or paying these

workers less because of their status, race, or gender (Waite, 2017). Generally, these employment opportunities were success stories, allowing migrant families to make enough money to purchase food and clothes for themselves and work towards saving for an apartment. However, on a few occasions, there were posts detailing interactions of community members attempting to scam these individuals.

One company posted an ad on Craigslist looking for workers to pay \$20 an hour to clean cars. One volunteer shared this opportunity with migrants as a part of the group, and once they got there, they were informed they would be paid per car, which in total was only \$30 to \$50 per day, around \$3 per hour. Some of the workers decided not to stay because of these unfair wages, and because of that, the owner messaged the volunteer of the Facebook group, saying that Venezuelans are 'lazy and entitled'. Horrible stories like these were prevalent throughout the Facebook group, which showed that even with advocates and employment opportunities, there are still barriers for these migrants in Denver to find jobs. The search for housing and employment seemed to happen at the same time; needing money and proof of employment was crucial in securing an apartment and paying rent. Usually, a work permit is required in order to apply for an apartment; however, without asylee or refugee status, they were not able to get a work permit for at least 180 days. Organizations that could help with rent assistance or finding housing were listed in the Google Sheets, but unfortunately, these resources were tapped out after a while, and even in recent posts in 2024, migrants are still struggling to pay rent in these apartments consistently.

Another fundamental resource that migrants struggled to gain access to was health care. Many migrants and volunteers seemed to be searching for hospitals and doctors' offices that would see patients regardless of status. Posts describing toothaches, strep, and birth

complications were frequent across the group, and all had the same question: where do we go for help? The consensus was that for emergency health needs, this population qualifies for Emergency Medicaid Services (EMS) offered through Health First Colorado, but an application is still required. There were examples of migrants who were able to get a single appointment at Denver Health but were paying much more out of pocket and may not be able to afford a follow-up appointment. This temporality of healthcare seemed to be a main difficulty for asylum seekers, and especially for these volunteers who could connect them to resources but not always guarantee consistency. Along with these resources and other general requests from migrants, the most complex and most recent resource was legal aid. Janet shared her experience trying to support migrants in the group with all the legal aspects, including work permits and asylum applications.

“One of my clients from my job signed me up for the free legal clinics to get them their work visas and things like that. And so, I started volunteering with a bunch of attorneys, and one of my things was, I need to understand this process and how it works. It's pretty complicated. But this applies not only to Venezuelans. It applies to a lot of other countries. It's a great resource, and it's a great thing to know for anyone who comes and needs those resources.” (Janet)

This legal sort of ‘training’ that Janet was involved in helped her understand the basics of getting work permits, and this was information she could share across the Facebook group to help both volunteers and migrants. However, as Darcy mentions, this legal support could not be offered by members of the group; it required a more formal process. “I had seen the need that these people that don't have all these specific designations need to have a way to apply for their asylum. But we just didn't really have the capacity to organize that. They could really use legal support. Because that's kind of expensive and time-consuming, and it's different from what the support is in the groups. It's less like humanitarian support.” Providing this legal aid in the group's capacity became a sort of barrier, and this was common among other volunteers' responses. As I kept up

with the posts in the group, legal questions popped up frequently, asking about how volunteers can provide migrant families with the correct legal information and services to receive documents that would allow them to be consistently employed and receive access to more services with asylum status. Many of the questions sparked conversation, and volunteers included brief legal information or names of other organizations that had the knowledge to help. Still, often, these questions were unanswered by volunteers.

Occasionally, immigration attorneys would join this group and give detailed answers about legal processes for Venezuelan asylum seekers, but as social media platforms function, these posts would get lost in a flood of other posts. Janet and Jake brought this up as a weakness when attempting to connect migrants to resources. “When I joined the group, and that’s what Juan was talking about, they just allowed anybody and all the migrants to join. And they started posting, posting, posting. And it would overshadow the resources that we were trying to find. It was out of desperation, but when we created a group for the hotels and over by the airport, which I’m the admin of, we decided to make that a closed group only for the volunteers.” (Janette) This creation of smaller subgroups helped efficiently connect migrants to resources by only posting resource information and then using it to message migrants who were asking for the resources. More organized and formal efforts like these were beneficial for more complex tasks, especially understanding the legal fees that are attached to the permit. Lawyers started hosting free clinics to assist migrants with the process, and were advertised throughout the Facebook group. As Kirsch states, “There is no funding to provide services to immigrant communities regardless of statuses” (Kirsch, 2023). This is especially true when this population of migrants is looking to attain asylum status, but is limited by a lot of the funding that assists them to do so.

What was so unique about this group was that although funding is less consistent, there was less constriction from the government about who could be supported, thus portraying a different level of deservingness than an NGO. However, this idea of choosing and prioritizing was experienced by volunteers, especially during the beginning stages of providing resources. Jake provided a first-hand experience when handing out clothing at one of the shelters.

“We have had to prioritize resources. I'll give you an example. We were at this event once where people were in line. It was towards the end of winter, but, you know, the winter here in Denver, it's cold. People are lined up because we're about to set things up for the donation event, and we saw this woman with this little girl, maybe around three or four years old. She was little, and they were just arriving in Denver. They were just dropped off at the shelter or the hotel where they were going to be staying, and they had absolutely nothing. This woman and this child were wearing, like, shorts and a tank top. The girl was barefoot. I mean, at that point, we had to prioritize and say you two can jump the line.” (Jake)

Jake's example further displays this difficult decision to prioritize resources. Although everyone in that line was there because they were seeking donations, this woman and her child had even fewer resources and required more urgent care with the current weather. Berlant (2004) has an argument that we often judge our compassion based on which pain is more compelling and which cases deserve our attention (Berlant, 2004). In Jake's example, he does make a judgment about who deserves attention first, but still is helping all of those who attended the donation event as well. Berlant's argument becomes exacerbated when the resource timeline becomes less about clothes and food, and more about employment and legal aid, and volunteers face the decision of having to choose which resource needs to be helped with.

For the IRC team, their role is to connect clients to various resources as they start the resettlement process. As Alice explained, “We (the IRC Team) help them find housing, but once the lease is signed, it is a relationship between the landlord and the tenants. Even with employment, we do not offer jobs for our clients, but we help them find jobs. So, we do more of connecting clients with interns and with volunteers in different organizations.” With the IRC as

an established NGO, there are many more formalized ways to connect clients with these types of resources, and that starts with the way IRC Denver is organized. Below are each of the sectors that have employees devoted to one aspect of improving the client’s resettlement journey, taken from the IRC Denver Information website.

Client Resource Guide-International Rescue Committee in Denver
Casework Team
Housing Team
Health Team
Public Benefits Team
Employment Team
Adult Education Team
Youth Team
Legal Team
Financial Capability Team
Health and Wellness Team
Community Engagement Team

Alice and the other individuals I interviewed were all a part of the Casework Team, as was I during my internship, but we continuously worked with members of each team. In one home visit, I worked with a Swahili-speaking couple who wanted to practice taking the bus to the husband’s new place of work. We wrote down every stop name together, and I input the route on Google Maps to make it easy to follow on his first day of work. Because I was only there to assist with navigation practice and other miscellaneous tasks, I constantly messaged the

employment worker who could provide me with information about his job details, while I would update him about the client's comfort level with taking the bus to work. In a sense, each team within the IRC needed to collaborate and communicate to properly support the client and connect them to the necessary resources. Even with the capacity of the IRC to assist clients with resources, it often depends on the community itself. I asked my interviewees to speak about Denver as a city compared to other IRC locations.

“I mean, Denver is a very liberal and sanctuary city, so we do have a lot of resources. We're able to just have a lot more service providers that we can refer clients to for different things, like English classes or just there's a wider network of other services that we can connect clients to. Communities are much more welcoming to working with our clients, like landlords or just employers, just things like that are much more eager to work with kind of our clients than at other locations, which I think is really nice. And then we also are able to receive a lot more LGBTQ clients.” (Miranda)

As we see from the background and setting of IRC Denver, it is crucial to lay out the support and resource access timeline as I did for the Facebook group. The Casework Team provides core services immediately after a refugee arrives in Denver. Within the first 24 hours of arrival, they receive warm clothes, a hot meal, and temporary housing. They will then do an initial check-in with IRC staff and receive groceries and a prepaid phone for one month. In the first week, they are given a prepaid card for one month and meet with various other teams in IRC, such as Housing, Health, and Employment. (IRC Denver, 2024). Throughout their first 90 days, they are provided with more intense support, and after the 90 days, they are provided with resources through the IRC but less direct support. Because it is a formal organization, there are more specific timelines for what services are offered, ensuring that most clients have enough support to live independently in Denver after those 90 days.

I noticed the level of support and resources clients were connected to, depending on their situation in their home country and what they were entering the US with. One family that I

frequently worked with reportedly had lived in a refugee camp for most of their lives and needed more support organizing their apartment and, in a way, remembering how to live in a permanent home with running water, electricity, and appliances. They also spoke the language Sango, with only one family member speaking French, so Language Line interpretation was necessary to communicate and created barriers to fully understanding their needs. Even with Language Line available, there were no interpreters who spoke Sango, so I would only directly communicate with the French-speaking client, which limited the progress of their resettlement. With the queer Venezuelan couple I worked with, it seemed that they were further along in their resettlement journey after only being there for a few months and starting the job search. This comes down to the ease of resource access for Spanish speakers versus less common languages, which allowed them to quickly receive basic needs and communicate with community members, especially at the IRC. Caseworkers meet the clients where they are and support them in unique ways, which sometimes can be more intensified as they adjust to a new country. With this support timeline, there is a way to support urgently to set up clients for more periodic support in the long term. The length of support for clients is often based on the funding and bandwidth of the staff.

“I think in terms of service provision, there can be a lot we can offer. Capacity-wise, I think, goes back to another weakness, which is that funding is always limited, but compared to the informal groups, we have a lot more funding and resources. It's hard for me to offer cash assistance to clients because it is not enough for them to survive on, but it's more than nothing. We say we can pay your rent for three months and just being very clear about those expectations and we have developed language around that as for ways to improve it. I mean, if we had more funding, there's a million things that we could do. I think that's always, like, the limiting factor. There are a lot of programs, like, I would love to see our office do a lot more programming around, like, mental health and trauma and support groups for clients, because I think that's one really big gap. A lot of programming is really focused on that first 90 days to one year, and then after that, there's not a focus on integration as much. It's kind of like, well, people find community, they find their groups, and I think we could do a better job of developing some of that.” (Marnie)

With limited funding, the staff focuses on the initial support in the first 90 days and, unfortunately, must move on to new arrivals after a few months, with the clients being referred to other sectors of the IRC for further support. However, cases can be kept for as long as they need urgent support, with the casework team making that decision case by case.

“I’ve had clients where I was supposed to close their case after three months, and then if they need support, I will refer them to the integration team. But if I believe that they don’t need support, I will just keep them with me. And I have clients that I have had since last year. I still talk to them. I still work with them because, you know, they needed the help. Even talking to or emailing their landlord if something is not working is just a huge relief to them.” (Harry)

This more formal support timeline can always change and depends on the specific resources clients need from caseworkers. There may be direct cutoffs, like stopping paying rent after the first three months, but it is not so rigid, and there is room for more informal decisions to be made based on the client’s well-being. In my experience, the IRC has volunteers and interns to help with more miscellaneous tasks as part of more formal casework that the members of the team need to be constantly working on. The timeline of support becomes more formal than the Facebook group because the IRC is able to delegate clients to different sectors within the IRC, as well as other organizations that can provide a broader range of resources. There are also different levels of positions, starting with the CEO of IRC, supervisors of each department, and employees in the department. Most of the work is within each team, but there is still a clear boss and hierarchy, which differs from informal community groups.

When discussing support systems and connecting migrants to resources, it is necessary to look at who is receiving the support and, more importantly, who is receiving the funding in the context of IRC. As Piccoli & Perna discuss, organizations rely on donations or temporary contracts that can only fund services in the short term. This lack of sustainability contributes to resources being limited, and employees are forced to be selective with who receives resources

first, playing into the hierarchies of deservingness (Piccoli & Perna, 2024). During the interviews, I asked if the caseworkers had opinions or examples of deservingness within their work.

“The IRC has to support people with a status. So, this would be the agreement between the federal government and IRC. We do not make that decision, but they will provide us with the funding. There are a lot of gaps. In terms of funding, we definitely see certain groups receive more funding than others.” (Alice)

“Within the clients, it is not about deserving but prioritizing who needs more support. I do work a lot with specific clients, not because they deserve it but because they need the help. I have some families, who I don't really need to see that often because have community connections here or they speak good English.” (Harry)

“A lot of the newcomers and the Denver area are from Venezuela. They're seeking asylum, and they'll come into our office, and we aren't able to help them because of how the government's decided to draw that funding. When all the Afghan nationals came to the United States, there was a ton of funding for that because there was a big feeling that these were our allies. There was an outpouring of funds, where we had all this Afghan-specific money. We can pay this Afghan family's rent for six months, but this Congolese family could face eviction. And that inequity of how funds are given is really difficult.” (Marnie)

Marnie brought up a crucial question that I had been thinking about at the start of my research and formation of this project: What are the differences in resources allocated based on status or origin? Unfortunately, the government plays a more significant part in these decisions by providing funding for refugee-status individuals and more funding for those who come from a country with a relationship with America. Even though the government is the one making the decisions, the blame can be placed on caseworkers, who seem like they are choosing to support groups of migrants more than others, but it is tied to the funding that keeps the IRC and other NGOs running. Author Tahir Mahmood debates whether government funding for NGOs is a ‘blessing or a curse’ and brings up the loss of autonomy that often comes with government funding. “NGOs with closer ties to the government have constrained activities, for example, although such organizations carry out advocacy work, it is not up to the standards of broad

political debates but is only restricted to politically acceptable areas and mostly to the non-sensitive issues” (Mahmood, 2016). Relating to the government ties the U.S. has with Afghanistan versus a lack of funding and support for Palestinian refugees because of the ties to Israel, as Marnie brought up. The IRC activities are often strained because of the political side of funding for refugees of specific countries of origin. This contributes to the concept of deservingness when caseworkers must pick and choose types of migrants to support based on government constraints. Miranda and Marnie both expressed to me on my first couple of days that there are clients who walk into the office looking for support, and as much as they do not want to, they must turn them away because of status. Gaps persist even with the level of formal support and constant resource provision at the IRC and other NGOs.

Clients across both support organizations generally receive similar resources, but the methods of distribution vary in organization and formality. Government-funded programs like the IRC tend to offer more structured support due to their greater access to funding, but this often comes with more formal safeguarding policies that can restrict the ability to respond flexibly to individual needs, such as offering informal emergency housing. In contrast, community-based organizations, like this Facebook group, operate with more informality and adaptability, allowing for quicker, more personalized connections to resources. However, they often lack financial stability and governmental program access, creating challenges in sustainably supporting many different migrant populations. It is essential to support migrants throughout their own personal timeline, especially connecting them to services for the future that can help with larger legal tasks like obtaining a Green Card. For the sustainable allocation of resources for migrants, it is necessary to have constant funding and participation throughout these organizations to one day have the means to support any migrant regardless of status or origin.

Chapter 5: Motivations and Values: Why Do We Support?

Understanding the “why” behind supporting migrants and reasoning for being a part of a specific community group helps display morals and values that motivate individuals to do this work. The idea of deservingness and prioritization reflects how societal attitudes and personal decisions shape these mobilization efforts. To understand how groups mobilize to create spaces of support for migrants, it is important to understand their values. Argo & Jassin’s research looks at sacred values that Americans have that influence their view on immigration issues. They found that sacred values can make it easier to mobilize because of how linked they are to identity and emotion (Argo & Jassin, 2021). Important attitudes within these values include universal humanity, equality, and moral obligation. Many saw equality for all people, including migrants, as a core American value, which includes providing safety for all migrants. The research participants also felt that America, as a nation made up of immigrants, has an obligation and the capacity to take care of and provide opportunities for migrants (Argo & Jassin, 2021). These stances and values expressed are often based on religion or political views that are often inconsistent with the immigration policies of the state or nation. In the context of religious organizations supporting migrants in the United Arab Emirates, values from different religions influence the motivations to act. The dialogue between religious leaders and followers helps to discuss shared concerns and enhance understanding to feel motivated to be in solidarity with migrants (Hamdi et al., 2024). Religious organizations provide charity and assistance in line with their teaching and values, like compassion and helping those in need, which applies to migrants seeking support.

Political values and levels of involvement also became a motivation for supporting migrants. Data from research about the politics of pro-migrant volunteering showed that with

previous engagement in political movements, they will likely participate in pro-migrant volunteering because of their political engagement and motivation to reach policy goals (Artero, 2024). Oftentimes, political change is not a factor, and rather, the concept of “de-bordering solidarity” becomes more of a reason to support migrants. This term is used to express the political meaning behind the mobilization of volunteer support while objecting to border control policies. Specifically, they are not aiming to enact political change but rather support migrants despite the current political climate (Ambrosini, 2022).

Values, including political and religious ones, contribute to the actual motivation to support migrants and can be categorized by the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI). The VFI is a 30-item research method to assess six key motivations in volunteering: values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement (Meijeren et al., 2023). Focusing on values is important within the context of refugees and asylum seekers because it motivates citizens to demonstrate their beliefs and humanitarian values through acts of compassion (Meijeren et al., 2023). The interviews from this study found volunteers for refugees indicated that they value justice, and show concern for others with statements like ‘I feel compassion toward people in need’ and ‘I volunteer, because I want everyone to be treated justly, even people I don’t know’(Meijeren et al., 2023). Volunteers can also feel motivated because they emotionally identify with migrants, as they have had similar journeys themselves, so they can sympathize with them.

In supporting migrants, the motivations and values behind the actions are by far the most important. Before migrants can get connected to resources or organizations like the IRC or the Facebook group, there are people who have the motivation to help and support. In the interview,

I asked what motivates each person to support refugees and asylum seekers because I wanted to know the specific reasons behind why these individuals do what they do. It also made me think of my own motivations for getting involved and ultimately creating this project. Upon reflection, I recognized that this was unfolding around me, and I could not look away. Members of my own community were offering support in various ways, motivated solely by a shared sense of humanity and the urgent needs of migrants who had been bussed to our city. I wanted to use any time I had back home in Denver to make even a small difference. Whether it was using my Spanish to translate or trips to Goodwill sourcing donations to bring to the shelters, I helped to support my community's efforts.

With the IRC, I was motivated to be a part of a larger NGO's work and to understand how these groups mobilize and function to support refugees, as they often come into this country with nothing and are slowly resettled into the community of Denver. As I think about my first day at the IRC meeting with Sonia, my internship responsibilities, as well as human empathy, become my motivations. I recall each day feeling like I had helped Sonia and other clients with many aspects, but also would go home and think about the various obstacles that still lay ahead. There were days when I would spend hours on one task, like paying an Xfinity bill, but I couldn't finish, and I would run out of time that day. After experiences like that, I felt a strong urge to return the next day, to help address the problem and ask what more I could do. After interacting with clients face-to-face, it feels impossible not to continue to help in any way, shape, or form, especially with all of the resources that the IRC has to offer. Although there were significant differences in other ethnographic themes, the motivations of the individuals I interviewed were very similar. Obviously, time commitments differ when this is your full-time job versus when you volunteer, but the urge to help was a constant theme.

Argo & Jassin's research aligns with the interview data; values like equality and moral obligation, combined with identity and emotion, are enough to mobilize and support in various ways to promote equality for all people, especially migrants. The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) is a common way to understand the "why" behind volunteers and employees helping migrants, and is a great way to frame the motivations of each interviewee. Meijeren et al. found that values are a large motivation, but data also showed that volunteers can feel motivated because they emotionally identify with migrants' similar journeys or have relatives who have gone through the same thing and sympathize as a motivation (Meijeren et al., 2023). To demonstrate the similarities in motivations, I drew parallels between members of the same group as well as members who shared similar motivations despite working in different groups. Alice and Harry of the IRC shared the same life goals of giving back to the community and easing the refugee resettlement process that they had been a part of in the past.

"When I was younger, my family was displaced a lot too. We moved a lot, but it was within the country, so it's not under refugee definition per se. When I was younger, I made a little promise to myself. If I can make it different when I grow older, I will. So here I am. Part one is, yes, I do want to contribute in ways I can, but part two is just living up to my own promise."
(Alice)

“I have been working with the refugee community way before college, over ten years ago. Because I myself came as a refugee, a long time ago, I knew about IRC when I was at a refugee camp in Ethiopia. They had a branch, so I was familiar with their work. And then, I moved to Denver from New York right before the pandemic. I decided to go back to helping the refugee community, and I applied and got hired. I see how difficult life is in another country, starting with me. A lot of the refugee community either don't speak English at all or they speak very little, it's really hard and difficult. Even to do easy errands, it's very difficult. I started helping my friends and saw what little help can create big impacts.”
(Harry)

These backgrounds were not present in the volunteers of the Facebook group, but I infer that there are members of the group with refugee backgrounds as their motivations. An observation that I made early in my research process was the number of women working in this field compared to men. I had met Harry and Jake in these groups, but primarily, the people I was working with the closest were women, specifically mothers. Jo, Darcy, and Tasha were all mothers, and though Jo was the only one who explicitly touched on this in her interview, motherhood significantly impacts motivation. “Well, I think you sort of put yourself in their situation and start to think, if I lived in a country where the best option was to walk through seven countries with my children for a better life, how can we not support them?”

Harry also brought up the idea that putting ourselves in their shoes is necessary for humanizing migrant populations. “We understand how difficult it could be because we were in their shoes at some point. And that perspective makes us, I think, different from the other groups that you mentioned. Having that connection is already important for doing the work. Even if you don't have that personal experience, we know someone close to us who has had a similar experience.”

Other interviewees' motivations focused on the community environment in which their career or volunteer time was spent.

“I feel like I was always kind of drawn back to IRC. I started as an intern and then found my way back. I loved the community aspect of it, not only with the staff but

also with the clients. I also strongly believe in the work that IRC does and the connection of finding homes for people who have been displaced and making them feel welcome and part of our new community and really helping them feel integrated. There are a lot of different resettlement agencies that do this work. I'm particularly drawn to IRC because of the international scope of the work and then also because it's not religiously affiliated. That was a big factor for me as well."

Marnie saw the IRC as a community, not just within staff, but also in the interactions between staff and clients, which are unique. She mentions not wanting to work in a religiously affiliated organization, which differs from the literature from Hamdi et al., stating that motivations to support migrants can be based on religious values and interactions with religious leaders and members (Hamdi et al., 2024). This is common as there are various religiously affiliated organizations working to support migrants, but if motivations are not religious, it's important to have groups of people who share other values in their work.

"First it was about their work ethic and getting to know them and seeing how much they wanted to work and that they just needed opportunities. But then, once I started getting involved in getting them their basic needs, like apartments, furnishing the apartments, paperwork that they needed to do, and paying taxes, I just wanted to see all that stuff through. And there are some things that we just still haven't even been able to do. It's just motivating to me because I can't imagine how they could do some of this stuff without support. Also, at Christmas time, we sourced gifts for the kids, and that was super rewarding. So, there's a lot of emotional, intrinsic value I get from helping them." (Darcy)

"I really enjoy seeing clients grow and see their journey. They've had really traumatic experiences and backgrounds, so just seeing the community and homes they've built in Denver is why I continue to enjoy the work. It is just being able to connect with clients and help them rebuild their lives here." (Miranda) Through these quotes, Miranda and Darcy emphasize their motivation to see the growth of migrants as they resettle and be a part of that entire journey. Once they get involved in the day-to-day aspects and see them become more settled, it can be highly motivating to see it through and offer continuous support, which is something I absolutely felt when working with both migrant support groups.

“The feeling that you get when you do something very minor. It took like 20 minutes of your time, but it helped them get on a bus and go to work. Just rewarding things.” (Tasha)

“It's the small interactions with clients and watching their journey that always brings me back to the work because while I believe in the overarching mission of finding homes for people and helping them rebuild their lives and feel integrated goes so far, you need some of that person-to-person interaction, and so it's just the little things. As a supervisor, I do much less of it, just getting client interactions. Like, I'm doing an airport pickup on Friday, and I haven't done one in months, and that's a really fun way to bring me back to why I started this work because I get to greet a new family at the airport, or today, I had a home visit with a client and helped them navigate a difficult situation and supported a caseworker.”
(Marnie)

The act of focusing on small positive interactions when working to support migrants becomes a motivation and could potentially increase the longevity of support. As Marnie said, it brings her back to why she started this work and the humanitarian goals she and other members are trying to accomplish. Especially when the work can seem overwhelming and unattainable, I felt like helping clients reach their goals, even small ones kept me motivated.

“Right before when I first moved to New York, I started working, like, helping refugees, mainly, like, as an interpreter, and I would help them, you know, apply for jobs, help them with appointments, and so on. And that is how I started, you know, helping the refugee community.”
(Harry)

“We've helped a lot of people with interpreting and translating. I honestly just heard what was on the news, you know, and had no idea the level of need that there was and what was happening until I got involved. The first time that we went to an event, I mean, the things that we saw were so intense, I think is the word. (Janet)

“I mean, it was really shocking. You know, because initially we just went to, hey, let's help with translation. It's not costing us anything. We can help and support these guys and see what the deal was. (Jake)

“I also saw the fact that there was nobody that stepped up that spoke Spanish. That was such a big barrier, and when we got there, we were still the only ones.” (Janet)

Janet and Jake shared the same experience of getting into this work through translating or interpreting to facilitate interactions and ease communication. Janet expressed how much of a need there was for people to interpret for Spanish-speaking migrants, and no one was there to translate at events properly. It seemed like Jake and Janet felt they were only there to translate, but once they got there, they realized the intensity of the situation, and as they learned more about it, they wanted to find other ways to help. Harry similarly started his career as an interpreter for refugees, just like the Language Line services, but it became deeper than that, where he was helping with job applications and housing, even by providing interpretation services. I think once you start helping with one thing, it’s hard not to want to assist with other issues in the clients’ lives, see the severity of the situation, and delve into that field of work.

Ultimately, what unites everyone in doing this work to support migrants, whether you are a volunteer or a full-time employee, is a sense of empathy and a goal of supporting migrants in various aspects of their resettlement process. By pairing quotes from interviewees of both groups, it was clear that there was a diverse set of motivations and values that transcended the group each person was a part of. Whether they had personal experiences of displacement or simply wanted to use their translation skills to help, a collective drive to support those who have migrated to Denver was a common theme in my research. These motivations fuel the constant support that allows small day-to-day actions to have a significant impact on migrant communities. This highlighted the fact that although various aspects of organizations are essential, it is personal motivations and values that make these spaces of support possible.

Conclusion and Implications

This research examines the role that community organizations and groups play in creating spaces of support for migrants through social networks. Specifically, looking at two different types of organizations, IRC Denver and the Central Park & Park Hill - Newcomer (Migrant) Support Facebook Group, to understand exactly how these groups mobilize to provide support for migrants. Initially, I viewed the IRC as a more formalized group than the Facebook group, but in working with both organizations, I saw that there were similar themes found by interviewing participants of the groups that portrayed the work done as much more similar in the way they function. An emphasis on building relationships and trust by interacting with clients face-to-face was prevalent for both groups and is necessary for understanding the migrant's background and what support they require. Both of my introductions to these groups and their work started with the simple interaction of meeting with a family or an individual to simply hear their story. This project also displayed the role of using social media to connect to a larger group of volunteers and migrants to spread information and organize support efforts in a quicker way. Traditional media was necessary for the IRC to include press releases detailing their impacts and services and was used to dispel misinformation and accurately describe the efforts of the Facebook group volunteers to the Denver community. The timeline of connecting migrants to resources was similar in the sense that initially the needs are more basic, like food, clothing, and shelter, and eventually looking for employment, permanent housing, and legal support. However, with the IRC's funding for these resources mainly tied to the government, there is a stricter timeline focused on the first 90 days. This timeline also depends on having refugee status or their country of origin, for resource funding. For the Facebook group, I saw the evolution of the posts from basic need donations to more complex questions, and without governmental restrictions,

they could freely support migrants coming into Denver, which ended up being mainly Venezuelan asylum seekers. Although funding is inconsistent without government support, simply having volunteers act as a bridge to other organizations proved crucial in helping migrants resettle in the Denver community. Finally, the motivations and values that the interviewees expressed were extremely similar between the IRC and the Facebook group, and pairing quotes together helped emphasize how crucial it is to have these similar motivations to work together and continue to create spaces of support for migrants. By understanding these four overarching ways that the groups function, this project aims to show the importance of these participants, whether they are volunteers or employees, and the need to create various groups to eventually support all migrants, regardless of status, origin, or other factors. With the new administrative changes and discriminatory policies against migrants, we need these groups now more than ever to work within the community to provide support for migrants despite the restrictive governmental actions. This ethnography makes a case for the importance of community groups, whether they are a part of larger national organizations or simply neighbors of Central Park communicating via Facebook, showing the broader implications of social networks as we look towards the future of this country. As Jo concluded in her interview, “We think about our country and our families and how they got here, even if it was a generation or multiple generations ago, somebody helped them when they got here. It may have been a family member, it may have been a stranger, but we can't just close the door behind us in our country.”

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