

# **What Does ‘Welcome’ Look Like?: Understanding Private Refugee Sponsorship in the United States**

By Abby Kodidek



Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public  
Policy Studies and Human Rights

Preceptor: Nina Kerkebane  
Second Reader: Lindsay Gifford

April 14, 2025

## **Abstract**

The U.S. is the most recent of several refugee-receiving countries to develop a private refugee sponsorship program—the Welcome Corps program—to bolster refugee admissions. Private sponsorship constitutes an alternative model of refugee resettlement to the traditional government-assisted sponsorship, wherein groups of private citizens are responsible for raising funds for resettlement and delivering core resettlement services to refugees. This research aims to provide the first in-depth investigation of the Welcome Corps program through the eyes of sponsors. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 sponsors, I examine how sponsors encounter, navigate, and contest the stated bounds of their roles. I find that while sponsors are fairly successful at fulfilling their prescribed sponsorship tasks, sponsors struggle to navigate the disagreement and conflict inherent in the sponsor-sponsee relationship. I conclude with recommendations for improvements in the Welcome Corps program and U.S. refugee resettlement more generally, as well as future research directions.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are several people I must thank for making this thesis possible. Firstly, thank you to Professor Lindsay Gifford for sparking my initial interest in refugee studies, and for your invaluable guidance in the process of researching for and writing this thesis. If you had not told me “Yes” when I hesitantly proposed this initial topic, I would have never had the confidence to follow it through. Thank you to my preceptor Nina Kerkebane for your helpful feedback and comments throughout the process. To my roommates who were always hearing me constantly complain about this project, thank you for putting up with me. I also want to thank Professor Jessica Darrow for deepening my understanding of U.S. refugee resettlement policy and for always believing in me as a researcher and as a student. Finally, I must thank the 15 sponsors I interviewed for being trusting enough to share your stories with me—without your insights, this thesis would not be possible. The work you have done and continue to do in support of refugees worldwide is incredibly admirable, and something we should all aspire to.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	4
Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.	4
Why Private Sponsorship?	5
The Welcome Corps Program	7
Literature Review	10
Theorizing Integration	10
Sponsorship and Integration	11
Sponsorship Dynamics	13
Private Sponsorship in the U.S.	15
Contribution to the Literature	16
Methods and Data	17
Sample	17
Interview Protocol	18
Data Analysis	18
List of Interview Participants	19
Findings	21
Navigating Sponsor Obligations	21
Challenges to Service Provision	21
Going Above and Beyond	25
Adaptation Strategies and Problem-Solving	29
Sponsor Expertise and Knowledge	29
Leveraging and Accumulating Resources	32
Lacking Guidance and Information-Sharing	35
Sponsorship as a Relationship	38
Relationships and Emotions as Motivation	38
Misaligned Priorities, Disagreement, and Paternalism	41
Policy Implications	47
Recommendations for Welcome Corps	47
Recommendations for Refugee Resettlement More Generally	51
Private Sponsorship vs. State-Sponsored Resettlement	53
Future Research Directions	56
Conclusion	58
Appendix	60
References	61

## **Introduction**

In January 2023, President Joe Biden announced the launch of the Welcome Corps program, the United States' first private sponsorship program for refugee resettlement in decades. The U.S. is the most recent in a string of refugee-receiving countries, such as Canada and Australia, to add private sponsorship initiatives to their existing refugee resettlement efforts. Amidst a growing global refugee population—43.4 million in 2023, a 7% increase from the year before and a nearly 300% increase from a decade earlier—countries have increasingly turned to alternative migration pathways like private sponsorship to bolster refugee admissions (UNHCR 2023).

Private sponsorship constitutes an alternative to traditional government-sponsored models of refugee resettlement. Each country structures their refugee resettlement programs slightly differently, but for the most part, government-sponsored models involve states delegating funding and support to refugees for the duration of a defined “resettlement” period. In the U.S. model, this funding flows through refugee resettlement organizations, who employ caseworkers to assist refugees during resettlement: securing housing, signing up for benefits, helping search for a job, and providing other relevant services. Alternatively, in the private sponsorship model, sponsor groups composed of private citizens are the ones who provide this funding and support to newly arrived refugees, acting both in the role of the government and the refugee caseworker. To put it another way, private sponsorship places the burden of integrating refugees into their new communities primarily on the shoulders of private citizens.

Policymakers hail private sponsorship as an innovative and successful strategy because of its ability to increase refugee admissions, largely ignoring what consequences sponsorship has for refugees themselves. Scholarship on sponsorship initiatives in other countries is quite mixed on this topic. Some scholars argue that private sponsorship equips refugees with increased social

capital, allowing them to more quickly find employment and thus achieve self-sufficiency (Hynie et al. 2019; Lambda and Krahn 2003; Hanley et al. 2018). Scholars also point out that sponsors are motivated to provide support often beyond what is required of them, therefore facilitating better integration outcomes (Kantor and Einhorn 2017; Agrawal 2019; Scoles 2021; IRCC 2016). Others argue that sponsors, as private citizens, lack the specialized knowledge and training necessary to facilitate successful resettlement, which leads to difficulties in resettlement, misinformed decisions, and in some cases paternalistic attitudes towards refugees (Elcioglu 2023; Agrawal 2019; Scoles 2021; Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh 2021). Scholars also find that some sponsors exploit or even abandon the refugees they are supposed to support, leading to disastrous resettlement experiences (IRCC 2021; Agrawal 2019; Arnault and Merali 2019). However, this existing research pays little attention to the perspectives of sponsors or the role that the larger policy context may play in facilitating, amplifying, or preventing these resettlement trends.

A separate but less rich strand of research focuses on the dynamics of the sponsor-refugee relationship: how sponsors engage with sponsees and what consequences this has for refugees' resettlement experiences and outcomes (Lenard 2019; Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020). This research has attempted to center and critically examine the perspectives of sponsors and understand not only how they interact with those they sponsor, but also what informs these interactions (Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020). Also important here is the function of the larger policy context in orienting sponsors to the sponsor role and the experience of resettlement, of which there is only initial research (Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020).

My research aims to contribute to both of these strands of research through an emphasis on sponsor perspectives and a consideration of the larger policy context. Through semi-structured interviews with sponsors across the United States, I endeavor to understand the interaction between

programmatic guidance and how sponsors conceive of and manifest their roles. In particular, I want to understand how sponsors encounter, navigate, and even contest the way in which policy creates the sponsorship experience and the consequences this may have for those who are sponsored. Furthermore, as there is no literature yet examining the Welcome Corps program—and only minimal scholarship investigating U.S. sponsorship initiatives at all—this research provides an opportunity to critically examine private refugee sponsorship as it is being operationalized in the U.S. context.

I start by contextualizing the emergence of Welcome Corps within the overall trajectory of U.S. refugee resettlement. Next, I provide an overview of existing literature on sponsorship, focusing on how sponsorship affects integration and the dynamics between sponsors and sponsees. Throughout my findings, I contextualize the actions that sponsors take within the larger structure of the Welcome Corps program and U.S. refugee resettlement more generally. I find that as a function of sponsors' lack of resource and time constraints, they can and do consistently provide additional support, above and beyond their stated responsibilities as sponsors. I also find that in the course of fulfilling sponsor obligations, sponsors develop strategies to facilitate their work, accumulate resettlement knowledge, and leverage their social capital. On a more negative note, I find that due to sponsors' roles as volunteers, their support of sponsees and participation in sponsorship is conditional on enjoyment and positive emotions, not guaranteed. Moreover, I find that the structure of sponsorship, the narrowly-defined nature of sponsors' roles, and popular discourse surrounding refugees lead to frequent disagreement, and subsequently paternalism, between sponsors and sponsees. I conclude with recommendations for improvements in the Welcome Corps program and U.S. refugee resettlement more generally, as well as future research directions.

## **Background**

### *Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.*

Refugee resettlement is one of three widely accepted “durable solutions” to forced displacement. Resettlement is viewed as a solution of last resort for those unable to access safety otherwise—typically those defined as “most vulnerable”—and as a result affects only a small portion (half of a percent) of the world’s refugee population (UNHCR 2023). Traditionally, countries who engage in refugee resettlement are wealthy, Global North countries like members of the European Union and the United States. In the post-World War II era, refugee resettlement in the U.S. was run largely privately. After refugees were granted visas by the federal government and arrived in the U.S., resettlement support was provided by a myriad of community organizations, primarily faith-based (Bier and La Corte 2016). However, private refugee resettlement was later criticized due to inconsistencies in support and lack of coordination across different organizations (Gonzalez Benson 2016).

The passage of the Refugee Act in 1980 instituted refugee resettlement as a government-sponsored system (U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, orUSRAP) and largely eradicated private sponsorship (Cureton et al. 2024). In this system, the federal government provides funding to established, professionalized refugee resettlement organizations (RROs, many of whom had been involved with private refugee resettlement since the postwar years) to assist refugees with integrating into their communities after arrival. This work is taken on by caseworkers at RROs, who are assigned to individual or family refugee client cases. In addition to providing funding, the federal government sets uniform standards for service provision across RROs and monitors them to ensure compliance with these standards.

The federal government funds a variety of initiatives aimed at supporting refugees during resettlement. Through the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program, the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) provides \$2,425 per refugee to RROs to utilize towards meeting a refugee’s immediate needs in the first 90 days after arrival as well as organizational operating expenses (US Department of State 2022). In addition to this funding, refugees receive access to public benefits programs (TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Refugee Cash Assistance, and others) immediately upon arrival (Welcome Corps 2023). Refugees are also eligible for a patchwork of federally funded integration-focused services, such as employment preparation, job placement, and English language training, which are administered by different state governments, RROs, and community-based organizations (ORR 2023). The aim of resettlement services is for refugees to become economically self-sufficient as soon as possible, ideally by the conclusion of the 90-day R&P period when comprehensive resettlement support ends (Halpern 2008; Darrow 2018).

### *Why Private Sponsorship?*

Refugee sponsorship generally refers to refugee resettlement that is at least partially funded and carried out primarily by groups of private citizens or organizations that are not RROs.<sup>1</sup> Private sponsorship acts as an alternative pathway to international protection, separate from and in addition to the traditional refugee resettlement apparatus (UNHCR n.d.). This means that private sponsorship has the potential to raise overall refugee admissions without requiring additional financial support from the host government and (theoretically) not placing additional service

---

<sup>1</sup> Sponsorship also encompasses models of community sponsorship, wherein groups of private citizens are designated to provide certain types of support in resettlement—such as cultural orientation to the resettlement country—and RROs provide all other required services. For the sake of this paper, “private sponsorship” will refer to a sponsorship scheme where private citizens are primarily or entirely responsible for providing support in resettlement.

burdens on RROs. The thought is that private sponsorship leverages previously unutilized resources—the humanitarian goodwill (and dispensable incomes) of private citizens—to allow more refugees to be resettled (Korteweg, Labman, and Macklin 2023).

Canada has notably maintained a private refugee sponsorship program since 1979, and a variety of other countries, including Australia, France, Germany, and New Zealand have either undertaken or considered implementing some form of sponsorship scheme (Van Haren 2021). Private sponsorship re-gained prominence globally and in the United States after the highly publicized exodus of millions of Syrians to Europe and other surrounding countries mobilized governments to investigate alternative pathways that would increase overall refugee admissions (Cureton et al. 2024). In just four months between November 2015 and February 2016, Canada resettled over 25,000 Syrian refugees, of which almost half were privately sponsored refugees (IRCC 2017). Privately sponsored refugees eventually grew to represent the majority of all refugees resettled in Canada, a trend that continues at present (IRCC 2023).

In the past decade, the U.S. has started investigating and implementing certain sponsorship initiatives. Many RROs developed community sponsorship and co-sponsorship initiatives which pair newly-arrived refugees with community groups (such as churches, local clubs, and sports teams) who agree to provide some sort of financial, in-kind, social, or other form of support to the refugee(s) in addition to the services provided to the refugee(s) by RROs (Linn 2022; Palmgren et al. 2025).<sup>2</sup> In February 2021, the Biden Administration started looking into formalized private sponsorship initiatives as a way to rebuild USRAP, which had been nearly destroyed under the Trump Administration due to record low numbers of admissions (Prantl 2023; Cureton et al. 2024).

---

<sup>2</sup> Community sponsorship and co-sponsorship initiatives such as these typically do not qualify as complementary pathways, as community members mobilize to assist refugees who are already chosen to be resettled and receive some level of services through the traditional government-sponsored refugee resettlement mechanism.

Later that year in October, the Biden Administration created the first private sponsorship initiative since the 1990s—the Sponsor Circle Program—to provide support to thousands of Afghans who had been evacuated to the U.S. (Sponsor Circles n.d.). The Biden Administration later added sponsorship initiatives which allowed private citizens to apply to sponsor or to be matched with parolees from Ukraine (the Uniting for Ukraine program) as well as parolees from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (USCIS n.d.-a; USCIS n.d.-b). These private sponsorship initiatives aim to provide recent arrivals with financial, in-kind, and other support without placing additional stress on already-strained RROs.

### *The Welcome Corps Program*

In January 2023, President Biden announced the establishment of the Welcome Corps program, the first private sponsorship program for refugees since the 1990s. Welcome Corps is another component of the Biden Administration’s efforts to rebuild USRAP, with the stated goal of “[expanding the U.S.’s] capacity to provide a warm welcome to higher numbers of refugees.” (U.S. Department of State 2023).

The Welcome Corps program allows groups of five individuals to apply to sponsor a refugee or refugees. For the sake of affirming refugee agency, those sponsored as refugees through Welcome Corps will be hereafter referred to as “sponsees”. Sponsor groups must be made up of at least five adults living in the same community, all of whom are either permanent residents or U.S. citizens. These sponsor groups functionally replace the Reception and Placement (R&P) program, agreeing to provide to sponsees at least the amount of financial and in-kind assistance supplied to refugees by RROs under R&P. Applicants hoping to sponsor someone must demonstrate that they have raised (or will raise) at least \$2,425 per refugee (the R&P per-refugee

amount), 60% of which must be in cash. Using these funds and resources they raised, sponsor groups are required to provide core sponsorship services—typically provided by caseworkers at RROs—to sponsees for the first 90 days after arrival. These services include, but are not limited to: securing housing, helping sponsees sign up for English classes, signing up for eligible benefits, assisting with the employment search, securing interpretation and/or translation services, ensuring sponsees complete a medical screening, enrolling in schools and finding childcare, obtaining documentation, and orienting sponsees to American society. Generally, sponsors are responsible for any and all assistance sponsees may require within their first 90 days after arrival. Sponsors also complete 30- and 90-day reports which aim to ensure sponsees are meeting stated resettlement goals. If sponsor groups need any technical assistance, they can reach out to the designated Private Sponsor Organization (PSO) they selected on their application for sponsorship. PSOs are refugee-serving organizations (many are RROs) that provide assistance to sponsor groups, either in-person or virtually.

There are a number of steps sponsors are required to take prior to being able to receive sponsees. Sponsors must create their sponsor group and one of the sponsor group members must elect to become the Sponsor Group Coordinator, who will be responsible for taking a required training and submitting the sponsorship application. All sponsor group members are also required to undergo a background check prior to submitting their application. The application has multiple components where sponsors must demonstrate that they have adequately prepared and created a plan to support sponsees. For example, sponsors are required to list at least one resource for English learning and translation, where sponsees can enroll in Refugee Cash Assistance and other benefits programs, and what healthcare resources exist in their community that are accessible to sponsees. Applications are screened by the Department of State for completeness and accuracy.

There are two potential paths for pairing refugees with sponsor groups. Sponsor groups can elect to be matched with a refugee, where the Department of State will select a refugee(s) for the sponsor group from amongst refugee cases already approved for resettlement under USRAP (US Department of State 2023). On the application, sponsor groups can provide preferences for a specific size of refugee case, nationality or region, and/or language, which will ideally be taken into consideration when matching a sponsor group with a sponsee(s). Alternatively, sponsor groups can choose to name the sponsee(s) they wish to resettle. The Department of State will vet this individual and ensure that they meet the legal definition of a refugee, and if all goes smoothly the named individual can be resettled with that sponsor group. Through the process of naming, many sponsors may choose to resettle people they know, often extended family members or individuals known to them through community connections (Jedwab 2018). Thus, the sponsor-sponsee relationship becomes layered onto and interacts with already-established relationships.

## Literature Review

### *Theorizing Integration*

Refugee resettlement generally refers to the immediate period following a refugee's arrival in the designated resettlement country, wherein the refugee(s) starts to become integrated into their host community and rebuild their life. Understandings of what "integration" entails and the factors affecting integration remain subjects of debate amongst policy makers and refugee studies academics. Through tying the "success" of resettlement programs to the ability for refugees to become financially "self-sufficient" (and equating unemployment and social assistance use with failure), policy makers promote an idea of integration that focuses solely on finding and securing employment (Frazier and van Riemsdijk 2021). Furthermore, by provisioning resettlement resources for a finite period of time (either the first 90 days or first year after arrival), policy makers promote a vision of integration that is time-bound (Lenard 2019).

Academics and practitioners alike have pushed back on this narrow definition. In their seminal work, Ager and Strang (2008) draw on fieldwork with refugees and service providers to create a model for understanding refugee integration that extends past inclusion in the labor market and includes factors such as physical and mental health, language acquisition, acculturation, the development of social networks, feelings of safety and stability, and the realization of citizenship and rights. Ager and Strang (2008) also note that while each of these markers can be indicative of integration, they also further facilitate it. For example, while employment can act on its own as an indicator of integration, it can also facilitate the creation of community relationships, improve language and cultural competence, and promote feelings of belonging and stability. This model is particularly helpful in thinking about integration as an interconnected process with multiple relevant domains, not solely financial self-sufficiency.

Hynie, Korn, and Tao (2016) build upon Ager and Strang's model with the addition of two key elements. Firstly, Hynie and colleagues push back against the conceptualization of integration as a one-way street in which the refugee must adapt to their host community, incorporating into their model ways in which communities and institutions act to welcome and adapt to refugees. Secondly, and more importantly for our line of inquiry, Hynie and colleagues develop a preliminary understanding of the contextual factors that are found to play a role in shaping integration: a refugee's personal history, the social identity of the host community, and the larger socio-economic and political context. Sponsorship relationships, as structured by Welcome Corps and other sponsorship initiatives, are one of these contextual factors that influence and shape integration.

### *Sponsorship and Integration*

Research on sponsorship has primarily focused on how sponsorship affects the integration outcomes and resettlement experiences of refugees. A critical literature review of research on global sponsorship initiatives, with a particular focus on the Canadian sponsorship program (as the longest-running sponsorship initiative), shows that sponsorship leads to varied and mixed effects in integration, some incredibly positive and some catastrophic.

Private sponsors are often motivated to provide more support than is explicitly provided of them. In the Canadian context, sponsors can and do furnish privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs) with more material support than government-assisted refugees (GARs) (Agrawal 2019; IRCC 2016) leading to PSRs being more likely than GARs to report having their basic needs met in resettlement. Some sponsors choose to provide additional labor or emotional and social support, such as assisting with childcare and taking refugees to social engagements like sports games

(Scoles 2021; Kantor and Einhorn 2017). Others open up their homes to those they sponsor—providing them with transitional housing while searching for more sustainable options—or even co-sign a lease with them (Scoles 2021). Sponsors also have the ability to continue supporting PSRs past the required sponsorship period, with a small portion of sponsors choosing to do so (Kantor and Einhorn 2017; Agrawal 2019; Scoles 2021). The additional support provided by sponsors may in fact be the reason that privately-sponsored refugees are often observed as having higher employment rates and earnings and lower incidence of social assistance than their government-assisted counterparts in the immediate period following their arrival (Beiser 2003; IRCC 2016; Hynie et al. 2019; Kaida, Hou, and Stick 2020).

Some sponsors did the exact opposite: they chose to withhold or condition support, leading to disastrous consequences for refugees. In the Canadian program, sponsors sometimes refused to provide the minimum assistance they are required to provide, leading to refugees receiving inadequate income and housing support and some having to resort to food banks as a result (IRCC 2021; Agrawal 2019). Some refugees were exploited into paying their sponsors back for the resources provided to them or self-funding their sponsorship (IRCC 2021). When sponsors are unable to or refuse to provide services and completely abandon those they sponsored, this constitutes “sponsorship breakdown” and can force refugees into poverty, and occasionally, homelessness (Arnault and Merali 2019). Refugees are often hesitant to speak out about problems with their sponsors due to feelings of indebtedness and gratitude (Agrawal 2019; Arnault and Merali 2019), making it difficult to identify sponsorship issues once they have happened and therefore more difficult to remedy them.

For many sponsors, sponsorship is their first engagement with refugees or resettlement (Macklin et al. 2018), and thus they are relatively inexperienced regarding the challenges

associated with resettlement. In Canada, many sponsors described feeling insufficiently knowledgeable about what exactly resettlement entails (Elcioglu 2023; Agrawal 2019). In some instances, a lack of information turned into misinformation which was ultimately passed onto refugee families (Agrawal 2019). When it comes to housing, private sponsors often face difficulty locating safe and affordable housing due to their lack of strong and time-tested relationships with landlords, leading to less stable housing outcomes amongst privately-sponsored refugees (Scoles 2021). In the context of resettling Syrian refugees, sponsors sometimes operated under misconceptions about Syria's political, social, and historical context, such as believing that Syria was a "backward" and "undeveloped" country (Agrawal 2019). Consequently, some sponsors doubted the capabilities of PSRs and did not give them sufficient opportunities to become independent (Agrawal 2019; Kahil, Iqbal, and Maghbouleh 2021).

### *Sponsorship Dynamics*

A second, but smaller, strand of research on sponsorship focuses on the sponsor-sponsee relationship. As illustrated by prior research, sponsorship dynamics are highly complicated and multifaceted. Research on the Canadian program finds that sponsors are disproportionately white, well-educated, middle to upper class women over fifty, many of whom are retired (Macklin et al. 2018). Contrastingly, refugees are primarily people of color from the Global South who often have trauma from their experiences of flight and have lost much of their resources, social capital, and belongings. Sponsors are motivated to undertake sponsorship for many different and simultaneous reasons, such as a spiritual commitment to 'welcome the stranger', an ethic of humanitarianism, and personal or familial narratives of migration history (Macklin et al. 2018). Feelings of joy and pride derived from helping others are hugely important in not only motivating initial engagement

in sponsorship, but also in keeping sponsors engaged throughout the sponsorship process and undertaking subsequent sponsorships (Phillimore et al. 2021). Many sponsors develop deeply intimate relationships with those they sponsor – in some cases, quasi-familial relationships – complicating what is, at its core, a provider-client relationship (Lim 2019). Furthermore, through the “naming” of refugees, sponsors often mobilize sponsorship initiatives as a tool for family reunification and community solidarity, adding kin and co-ethnic relationships to already-muddled relationship dynamics (Lim 2019; Jedwab 2018).

Preliminary research finds that sponsors exhibit considerable variation in how they understand and navigate their responsibilities and role as a sponsor. Some sponsors choose to adopt paternalistic approaches to sponsorship, discounting refugees’ knowledge, skills, and agency and instead insisting on the supremacy of sponsor know-how (Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020). These paternalistic approaches are also characterized by relegating refugees to the position of receiving assistance at the whim of sponsors, who get to decide what is “best” for refugees in resettlement (Lenard 2019). Conversely, some sponsors choose to adopt mutualistic approaches to sponsorship that reinforce refugee agency, wherein sponsors view refugees as equal partners in the resettlement process and engage refugees in decision making (Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020). Sponsors who adopt this approach describe viewing themselves as facilitators, creating the conditions under which refugees can make their own decisions and “help themselves” (Lenard 2019). The approaches that sponsors take are a function both of their underlying acculturation orientations as well as a function of the larger policy context (Haugen, Lenard, and Regan Wills 2020).

### *Private Sponsorship in the U.S.*

While there is a large body of literature examining private refugee sponsorship in the abstract as well as its implementation in Canada, due to the youth of the Welcome Corps program, there exists no comparable literature studying sponsorship in the U.S. iteration. The U.S. has previously piloted certain refugee sponsorship models, although few of these models require nearly the level of financial and material support from sponsors that Welcome Corps does. Preliminary research on community sponsorship utilized by U.S. resettlement agency Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (now Global Refuge) found that community sponsorship has mixed results on refugee employment rates and wages (Linn 2022). More recently, research by Palmgren et al. (2025) found that in co-sponsorship relationships, co-sponsors acted as brokers to provide refugees with access to supplemental resources beyond those provided by USRAP, but that vague guidance surrounding co-sponsors' responsibilities as brokers could undermine service quality and lead to co-sponsors imposing their will on refugees. The most comparable precursor private sponsorship programs to Welcome Corps in terms of sponsor obligations are the Sponsor Circles and Uniting for Ukraine programs, although they differ slightly in the status of those sponsored (humanitarian parolees and special immigrant visa holders as compared to refugees) and programmatic structure and implementation. Prantl (2023) finds that sponsor groups in these two programs were typically effective in navigating resettlement, particularly getting those they sponsored connected with benefits and health care, although these sponsor groups did often suffer from a lack of information and know-how.

One small exception to the lack of research on Welcome Corps comes from Bose and Frazier (2023), who compiled some initial findings about the Welcome Corps program through a larger study of refugee resettlement. They find that there exists much confusion among sponsors

about where to receive assistance when navigating issues in resettlement, often turning to traditional resettlement agencies who already have strained resources and heavy workloads. However, these results have yet to be complemented by any in-depth analysis and have not yet been substantiated by other researchers.

### *Contribution to the Literature*

My contribution to the existing research is two-fold. Firstly, literature examining sponsorship dynamics lacks a consideration of the larger policy context surrounding sponsorship. Currently, there is no robust theoretical framework describing how the policies structuring sponsorship inform how sponsors approach their roles. I contribute to the existing literature by providing a critical account of how sponsors encounter, navigate, and contest the government structures surrounding private sponsorship, centering the perspectives of sponsors. I also examine the larger consequences the work and experiences of sponsors may have for the integration experiences of refugees themselves.

Secondly, I provide the first in-depth investigation into the implementation of private refugee sponsorship in the U.S., which has yet to be the subject of any substantial research due to its relative youth. Welcome Corps is a slightly different sponsorship configuration as compared to sponsorship initiatives elsewhere, and it is being implemented in a unique social, political, and economic context (the United States), both factors that are likely to impact the lived reality of sponsorship in Welcome Corps. This research allows for a critical comparison of Welcome Corps to existing sponsorship initiatives and can help us determine whether the dynamics observed in sponsorship elsewhere also exist within Welcome Corps.

## **Methods and Data**

### *Sample*

I draw on in-depth interviews with 15 different sponsors across the U.S. with the aim of creating a rich and comprehensive understanding of sponsorship experiences within Welcome Corps. I utilized my personal and professional connections within the resettlement space to recruit participants. I also reached out to individuals who had publicly identified themselves as being involved in Welcome Corps, typically through speaking publicly on their experience with the program on social media platforms or in news articles, to try and recruit a more geographically diverse sample. I used snowball sampling to enlarge my sample, asking sponsors to connect me with other members of their sponsor group as well as any other sponsors they knew personally. I did not include or seek out interviews with refugees or staff at private sponsor organizations partly because my research focus is sponsors, but also because refugees and PSO staff were more difficult to contact for interviews.

Sponsors came from seven different states and sponsored a total of 27 refugees from Colombia, Venezuela, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Syria. All sponsors undertook matched sponsorships; none had received a sponsee that they named. Some had previous experience with supporting immigrants or refugees (n=8), and for others Welcome Corps was their first encounter with this type of work (n=7). Multiple interviewees undertook more than one sponsorship (n=6) and therefore could speak to the differences and similarities between their multiple sponsor experiences. As there is no public information on the demographics of sponsors and refugees in the program, it is difficult to craft a representative sample. Additionally, my sampling method likely overrepresents positive experiences with the program, as those with negative experiences—sponsors who conflicted with or exploited/abandoned sponsees—are likely

more hesitant to speak about their experiences. I also identified and recruited some participants from news stories and other promotional materials about Welcome Corps, further contributing to a potential underrepresentation of negative program experiences. My small sample size limits the potential for generalizing results to a larger group of sponsors, although I attempt to compensate somewhat for this lack of breadth by focusing instead on depth.

### *Interview Protocol*

Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and took place over Zoom to accommodate participants' wide-ranging physical locations. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with guiding questions prepared in advance coupled with questions that developed over the course of the interview (see Appendix for full list of interview questions). Questions generally covered the participant's experience with the Welcome Corps program, such as: challenges encountered in resettlement and how they were addressed, types of support provided and length/amount of support, and relationships between refugees and sponsors. Questions were open-ended to give participants considerable freedom in their responses and thus encourage nuance and divergence in perspectives between participants. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview format allowed me to solicit in-depth responses and thus observe the dynamics within Welcome Corps.

### *Data Analysis*

Interviews were recorded with the participant's consent and text-to-speech AI software (Otter.ai) was used to create transcripts that were later cross-referenced with audio recordings for accuracy. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). I reviewed transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the data before coding. Then, initial

codes were generated inductively to capture features of the data relevant to the research question. Codes were grouped into groups of themes and subthemes, which were refined iteratively and checked against the original transcripts to ensure validity and consistency. Coding software QualCoder was used to organize and manage the data.

*List of Interview Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Profile</b>	<b>Sponsee(s)</b>	<b>PSO</b>	<b>State</b>
PS1	Professor at small liberal arts college, has been engaged in refugee resettlement work with local town coalition since 2016.	Welcomed an older Congolese couple and a young man from Venezuela.	IRIS	NY
PS2	Lawyer, was involved in supporting multiple groups of Ukrainian parolees prior to participating in Welcome Corps	Welcomed a Venezuelan single mother and her young son.	Alight	MN
PS3	Retired civil servant, became engaged in supporting Ukrainian parolees (and later Welcome Corps refugees) through local Rotary club and church.	Welcomed a Venezuelan single mother and her young son.	Alight	MN
PS4	Retired professor and writer, became involved in Welcome Corps because of their membership in the LGBTQ+ community.	Welcomed a young man from Cameroon and a young woman from Syria, both LGBTQ+ identifying.	Rainbow Railroad	CA
PS5	Writer, became involved in Welcome Corps because of their membership in the LGBTQ+ community.	Welcomed a young man from Cameroon and a young woman from Syria, both LGBTQ+ identifying.	Rainbow Railroad	CA
PS6	Retired, became involved in supporting immigrants (and later refugees through Welcome Corps) through local church.	Welcomed a family from the Democratic Republic of Congo.	IRIS	IN
PS7	Retired, became involved in supporting immigrants (and later refugees through Welcome Corps) through local church.	Welcomed a family from the Democratic Republic of Congo.	IRIS	IN
PS8	Retired accountant, became involved in supporting Afghan evacuees (and Welcome Corps refugees) through local refugee-serving organization.	Welcomed a family from Colombia.	IRIS	CT

PS9	Doctor, Welcome Corps was first refugee resettlement engagement.	Welcomed a gay couple from Venezuela and Colombia and a family from Syria.	Refugee Welcome Collective	FL
PS10	Retired, became involved in supporting Afghan evacuees and co-sponsorship efforts (and later refugees in Welcome Corps) through local congregation.	Welcomed a family from Venezuela.	HIAS	NC
PS11	Retired, became involved in Welcome Corps through local community organization.	Welcomed a father and teenage daughter from Venezuela.	IRIS	NY
PS12	Retired, became involved in Welcome Corps through local community organization.	Welcomed a father and teenage daughter from Venezuela.	IRIS	NY
PS13	Retired clergy member, became involved in Welcome Corps through local community organization.	Welcomed two adult sisters from the Democratic Republic of Congo.	IRIS	NY
PS14	Retired, previously co-sponsored Syrian family with other community members.	Welcomed two families from Syria.	IRIS	CT
PS15	Retired, previously co-sponsored Syrian family with other community members.	Welcomed two families from Syria.	IRIS	CT

## **Findings**

In the following sections, I examine how sponsors encountered sponsorship as a role, a set of responsibilities, and as a relationship. First, I detail how sponsors accomplished their sponsorship tasks, focusing on the various challenges they encountered along the way and how they went above and beyond to provide support on their own terms. Next, I discuss various strategies and resources that sponsors mobilized to assist in carrying out their tasks. Finally, I delve into the relationship dynamics within sponsorship by investigating sponsors' motivations and how they dealt with conflict.

### *Navigating Sponsor Obligations*

#### Challenges to Service Provision

Sponsors encountered numerous challenges in completing their prescribed tasks. Finding housing was one task where sponsors often faced challenges. Several of those I interviewed lived in rural or suburban areas with limited affordable rental housing. Even where housing was available, landlords were often hesitant to rent once they heard the word “refugee” or when sponsees were unable to furnish credit scores or other standard rental documentation. This challenge was minimized partly by Welcome Corps's partnership with Airbnb, which provided sponsors with Airbnb credits that they could utilize towards temporary housing for the first month of sponsorship. Almost every sponsor I interviewed described leveraging these Airbnb credits to house sponsees for the first few weeks while continuing to search for more permanent housing that would suit sponsees' needs. Other sponsors followed a different route: they allowed sponsees to stay in their own homes. Two sponsor groups ultimately chose to go down this path due to difficulty in finding rental housing. One of the groups lived in a very rural community where

Airbnb housing was not available and rental housing was even more sparse. The other sponsor group lived in a city with exorbitant rent prices and a scarcity of Airbnbs. For both of these groups, Airbnb housing was not really feasible as a solution to housing shortages, so sponsors sought out alternative solutions. Important to note here is that Welcome Corps actually explicitly prohibits sponsors from housing sponsees with them unless sponsors and sponsees are relatives, as this presents plentiful opportunities for abuse and exploitation by sponsors. In both of these cases, sponsors chose to ignore stated Welcome Corps guidance—even though they recognized why it existed—because they felt it did not reflect the reality of their situations.

Aside from housing, the challenge sponsors mentioned most frequently was navigating various bureaucratic hurdles. Sponsors are tasked with signing sponsees up for any and all public benefits, getting them medical insurance through Medicaid, and obtaining any necessary identification and documentation, all tasks that require engaging repeatedly with different federal, state, and local government agencies. These tasks eat up considerable time and energy for sponsors. One sponsor described that in the early weeks of sponsorship, “It was two hours a day or more than that dealing with forms and errors. ‘Oh, they changed the form, oh that form no longer exists. It’s all digital now.’ Every time we tried to accomplish a task, there seemed to be barriers.” Another sponsor said that his group had actually refrained from requesting cash assistance and public housing assistance that sponsees were eligible for because to do so would require him to spend nearly all day at a public benefits office. This sponsor group had sufficient funds and resources and could do without the additional cash and public housing assistance, and so to them, spending an entire day dealing with red tape was undesirable and frankly unnecessary. For the most part, the bureaucratic difficulties sponsors encountered did not last forever and were

eventually resolved—although doing so usually required sponsors to devote a considerable amount of time and energy.

There was an added layer of difficulty for sponsors in more rural areas, as these towns had almost never welcomed refugees before. These sponsors were responsible not just for overcoming the traditional hurdles associated with bureaucracy, but also for educating staff at public benefits agencies on the specific situations and needs of refugees. One sponsor recounts:

We went to Social Security, and they [sponsees] had these very strange documents. They have no birth certificate. They have no you know, they have a border crossing thing with a stamp on it that says they're here permanently. That's kind of what they had. And the woman at Social Security **had never seen a refugee before** where we went, and she said, "You need a birth certificate." I said, "How do they get a birth certificate?" She says, "Well, they have to go back to where they were born." And I said, "**That's not gonna work with refugees.**" (author's emphasis)

By nature of their flight, refugees often lack important identification documents like birth certificates or passports. U.S. law states that refugees are eligible for public benefits and identification documents like employment authorization cards immediately upon their arrival—and prescribes which documents they need to do so—but this does not necessarily mean that staff members at government agencies are aware of these legal provisions. In order to carry out their sponsorship duties, sponsors were often the ones who had to educate staff on these and other provisions relating specifically to refugees.

It is important to note that the challenges encountered by sponsors, as described above, are not unique to sponsorship. Many are not even unique to refugee resettlement. Finding safe, affordable, and adequate housing is challenging for many Americans, a challenge that is exacerbated for refugees by their lack of credit or rental history and landlord prejudices. Social assistance programs, as noted by one sponsor, have onerous documentation and reporting requirements for nearly all applicants as a way to discourage reliance on welfare. However,

because sponsors may not have previous experience dealing with these issues, nor strategies for resolving them—as caseworkers often do—their impacts may be more acutely felt by sponsors.

Another challenge that sponsors faced was a lack of information or incorrect information about sponsees prior to their arrival. When undertaking matched sponsorships, sponsors provide specific criteria about what sponsees they wish to or feel best equipped to support, and Welcome Corps will match that sponsor group with individual(s) already pre-approved for resettlement through USRAP. Once sponsors are matched, they receive very basic demographic information regarding sponsees, which sponsors are supposed to use to prepare for resettlement. This information includes the number of sponsees and their approximate ages, country of origin, languages spoken and competency level, education level, and any health conditions. Oftentimes, the information provided to sponsors turned out to be incomplete or flat-out wrong, leading to sponsors having to take on additional responsibilities that they may not have signed up for or did not prepare for. For example, one sponsor group was assured that the couple they were going to welcome did not have any severe health issues, but upon arrival the sponsor group discovered that both sponsees had serious health issues that needed attending to. Luckily this sponsor group was able to find treatment for both sponsees; however, had this couple been assigned to a sponsor group that did not have the ability to handle such health issues, the sponsor group may have been completely overwhelmed and incapable of properly supporting this couple. The limited, and sometimes incorrect, information provided to sponsors was all they had to rely on until sponsees arrived in the U.S.; there was no way for sponsors to obtain further information about sponsees from the Department of State, nor was there any way for sponsors to communicate with sponsees. There is no clear statement from the Department of State as to why this is the case. Some sponsors hypothesized it is because travel plans are constantly changing and sponsees' arrival is never

guaranteed. Other sponsors hypothesized that it may have something to do with concerns about protecting the privacy of sponsees or preventing against trafficking or exploitation. Either way, there is no clear reasoning as to why this policy exists. As a result of the lacking, and occasionally incorrect, information provided to sponsors and policies preventing them from obtaining more detailed information, sponsors are often left to blindly prepare without knowing the full situation of the sponsees they are supposed to assist.

### Going Above and Beyond

Sponsors described devoting immense amounts of time, energy, and resources to helping sponsees, almost always above and beyond what was explicitly asked of them by Welcome Corps. Nearly every sponsor described raising, and consequently spending, more than the required \$2,425 per sponsee. Some of this additional money was spent in fulfillment of tasks that were required through Welcome Corps (like paying for living expenses); however, sponsors also chose to use these funds towards additional items that were supplementary to sponsor's explicit commitments. One sponsor group covered sponsees' entire dental bill (which cost several thousand dollars). Another sponsor group paid for a sponsee to attend driving school. Other sponsor groups used their funds towards buying a car for sponsees. One sponsor even chose to co-sign a lease with a sponsee, assuming a significant amount of financial responsibility and liability. Although not required by Welcome Corps, sponsors felt these tasks were part of what they ought to do as sponsors. In this way, sponsors contest the stated bounds of their role.

Sponsors also went above and beyond by continuing to support sponsees past their prescribed 90-day sponsorship commitment. Almost every sponsor I talked with ended up providing some form of assistance to sponsees after the 90-day mark. When asked why they chose

to do this, one sponsor said that, “For us, there's not really this cut off. We just have to do what she needs...to kind of guide her to be more and more independent as much as possible.” Although the Welcome Corps program defines sponsors’ commitments as lasting only three months, sponsors chose instead to use sponsees’ perceived independence as the marker of when their responsibilities were concluded. When sponsees were thought to be having difficulty adjusting to their new communities, sponsors continued to support them for as long as six months or more. In sponsors’ eyes, the 90-day mark acted primarily as a deadline for reaching prescribed milestones—such as securing necessary documentation—rather than a hard cutoff in support.

In certain cases, this commitment to providing more support than required stemmed from an active acknowledgement that 90 days was not nearly enough time for sponsees to become self-sufficient. Refugee advocates have long criticized the R&P program for its 90-day service period, saying that it is near impossible for refugees to attain self-sufficiency within such a short time frame (for comparison, Canada and the United Kingdom provide refugees with resettlement assistance for 12 months [IRCC n.d.; UK Home Office 2021]). Sponsors—particularly those who had prior experience in refugee resettlement—shared a similar sentiment regarding Welcome Corps’ 90-day cutoff. One sponsor, who had previously supported groups of Afghan evacuees, explained:

“But really, we said from the very start, **we never even had the expectation of three months. We just knew from our past experience** that, you know, we try to make a commitment of six months so that really, when we walk away, they know how to pay all their bills, they're earning enough money to cover their expenses, they're on the road to driving or car ownership, they're enrolled in schools, they understand how to navigate the medical systems. Our goal is for them, really, to be on their own in six months. **And we just can't do it in three.**” (author’s emphasis)

These sponsors contested their role being only three months in length, arguing that such a time period was too short for sponsees to truly become independent and flourish in their new

communities. Instead, they set their *own* boundaries for how long they would act as sponsors, often settling on a six-month sponsorship period.

Even when sponsors eventually stopped providing intense support, they continued to provide informal, periodic assistance to sponsees up to a year and a half after their initial arrival. When a sponsee got into a car accident, his sponsors stepped in and helped pay for his car repair fees. Another sponsor group drove sponsees to elementary school when the school bus did not show up and gave sponsees a “Know Your Rights” presentation after President Trump’s inauguration. A third sponsor group helped a sponsee study for her GED and was preparing to help her move to a different city. All of these events happened outside of the initial sponsorship period, meaning that sponsors no longer had any stated responsibility towards sponsees. Nevertheless, sponsors felt a sort of obligation—borne out of the bonds they had forged during the initial resettlement period—to help sponsees when asked. As one sponsor described, after a certain point, “it’s kind of less I have these official tasks I need to do, versus I’m a friend helping you out.” In their capacity as friends, sponsors continue to be a resource sponsees can rely on months and even years down the road.

Sponsors end up devoting more time and resources than required of them in part because they *have* more time and resources to dedicate. Many of those I interviewed were retired, and their involvement with Welcome Corps came about partly because they were looking for something to do with their free time in retirement. Some sponsors devoted portions of their own incomes towards supporting sponsees, meaning that sponsors *had* disposable income to use. Others mobilized their communities—many of which were middle or upper-middle class—who could and did provide funds and in-kind donations. Consequently, none of the sponsors I interviewed ever mentioned having any difficulty raising the necessary funds or worrying about running out of funds. Sponsors have

virtually no time or resource constraints that limit the amount of support they can provide; the only limit that exists is that which sponsors choose to set for themselves.

This stands in stark contrast to the situation of resettlement caseworkers. Caseworkers are tasked with providing the same amount of support to refugees as sponsors are to sponsees: using federal funds of \$2,425 per refugee, caseworkers are to assist refugees with fulfilling resettlement tasks and provide general support for 90 days. However, in the discharging of these responsibilities, caseworkers face extreme time, finance, and resource constraints that sponsors do not have. Refugee resettlement organizations are notoriously underfunded and understaffed, forcing them to do more with less (Darrow 2015). This often leaves caseworkers with large and unsustainable caseloads, having to split their finite time and attention between multiple newly arrived refugees and families. Furthermore, caseworkers often face substantial administrative burdens on top of their tasks as service providers, not to mention strict policy guidelines that dictate what caseworkers can and cannot do—including provisions of equity in delivering services (Fee 2025). While many caseworkers would love to donate additional attention and resources to clients above what is required—as sponsors do—they simply do not have the time, funding, or power to do so.

The immense resource gap between private sponsors and resettlement caseworkers even came to the attention of one sponsor group. This group had been supporting a young Syrian woman for nearly three months, but they were finding that she was really struggling to adapt to life in the U.S.. These sponsors felt out of their depth and extremely overwhelmed, so they reached out to their PSO who connected them with a resettlement agency in the area that would provide additional case management support. The sponsors talked to the caseworker about their situation, who told them: “We don’t do this. What [your private sponsor group is] doing is, like, 100 times more than

what we do. What we would offer would be maybe once a week, a telephone call, you know, getting hooked up. We don't have housing.”

As described in this section, sponsors contested the stated bounds of their roles, providing support to sponsees well in excess of what they are asked to provide. Sponsors are inclined to provide additional support because they feel doing so is necessary to facilitating better resettlement outcomes. As sponsors in this study do not face stringent constraints on their time or resources, they are capable of providing support above and beyond what is explicitly asked of them.

### *Adaptation Strategies and Leveraging Resources*

#### Sponsor Expertise and Knowledge

On the whole, sponsors were fairly adept at navigating the various tasks and challenges they were confronted with. While they may not have had prior experience with refugee resettlement specifically, many sponsors had valuable experience and skills that they leveraged when navigating resettlement. Several sponsors had backgrounds in social work or public administration, which oriented them to some of the difficulties inherent in navigating social services and bureaucracy. One sponsor group included several doctors and other healthcare professionals; they were able to leverage their contacts in the healthcare field to easily find providers willing to offer specialized services. Another sponsor had significant real estate experience as an owner of several rental properties, which he described as helpful for navigating the local housing market. Two sponsors had previously worked as Peace Corps volunteers, and they cited their experiences working across cultural and linguistic divides as something that was fundamental to being able to positively interact with sponsees. Amongst refugee resettlement professionals, there is significant worry that private sponsors often lack the specialized

resettlement knowledge that is necessary to ensure positive outcomes for sponsees (Meissner 2021; Elcioglu 2023; Agrawal 2019). These findings somewhat complicate this argument, demonstrating that while sponsors may not have resettlement-specific experience, some do have relevant experiences and skills that assist in navigating resettlement tasks.

Resettlement is an extremely complex and confusing process, and each new sponsorship brings unique challenges. While Welcome Corps provided training and other resources, according to sponsors, there was often no other way to truly figure out this process other than to jump straight into the deep end and learn on the job. As one sponsor put it, “There’s only so much training [you can do]...until you're in the trenches and figuring out certain things, you flail.” This element of experiential learning resembles what scholars term “resettlement knowledge”: integral resettlement expertise that caseworkers and other refugee resettlement professionals develop on the job (Fee 2025). This kind of knowledge is not provided in any sort of training, nor required via education or certification, but rather acquired through first-hand experience. Sponsors, as private citizens, often came into sponsorship lacking this experiential knowledge but acquired it over the course of their initial sponsorship(s). Whereas sponsors’ first sponsorship experiences may have been riddled with challenges, sponsors typically used these experiences as opportunities for learning and described their subsequent sponsorships as comparatively easier. At the very least, sponsors described being less nervous and feeling more prepared for sponsorships that were not the very first. This same rule extended to any prior experience with refugee resettlement, not just Welcome Corps experiences. When I asked whether a sponsor’s previous involvement with Afghan evacuees helped with her later Welcome Corps sponsorship, she answered: “Definitely, no question about it, we've learned some things the hard way. We've figured out better ways to do things. Our experience has just made us better at doing this.” Another sponsor who had previously

worked extensively with Ukrainian humanitarian parolees stated that not only did the process become easier, but it became more efficient: his group used significantly less financial resources on the most recent family they sponsored compared to the very first. The explicit responsibilities of sponsors under previous sponsorship initiatives—Sponsor Circles, Uniting for Ukraine, and CHNV—differ slightly from those under Welcome Corps, but other aspects, such as how to navigate the sponsor-sponsee relationship and how to deliver services, were quite similar. Through involvement with previous sponsorship both inside and outside of Welcome Corps, sponsors developed valuable resettlement expertise that further facilitated their work.

Several sponsor groups institutionalized the expertise they accumulated by developing organizational structures or systematic procedures for handling sponsee cases. A few of the sponsor groups I interviewed grew out of pre-existing immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations or groups. While these sponsor groups started out largely similar to others—a group of five like-minded individuals, by coincidence part of a larger organization, coming together to support a common cause—these groups often assimilated the expertise they learned into the function of these organizations. One way in which they did this was through developing specialized positions or teams for handling specific tasks. One sponsor group, which grew out of a congregation’s immigrant justice committee, created a designated employment team that would work with sponsees to craft resumes, apply for jobs, and prepare for job interviews. Another sponsor I interviewed worked as part of a town-wide refugee resettlement coalition that developed specialized roles for organizational members: some members specialized in healthcare, others specialized in government benefits, and the sponsor I interviewed specialized in navigating sponsees’ and organizational finances. Another way organizations institutionalized best practices was through establishing specific policies and procedures. For example, the town-wide refugee

resettlement coalition mentioned earlier created standardized financial agreements outlining what funds sponsors would provide, what funds sponsees would be asked to take care of, and how sponsees would be asked to increase their responsibilities until they became independent. The sponsor from this organization described that this agreement was informed by their “prior experience” in resettling refugees, as they had spent several years supporting Afghan evacuees through sponsorship. These sponsor groups, in developing specialized organizational structures and policies, started to look and behave more and more like refugee resettlement agencies instead of small ad-hoc community organizations.

### Leveraging and Accumulating Social Capital

In carrying out core sponsorship services, sponsors often relied on the resources and assistance of their larger social networks. Not only are sponsors asked to act as bridges between their communities and sponsees by connecting them to services and community resources, but sponsors are encouraged (and often required) to leverage their own social capital towards supporting sponsees.

Communities were vital resources for obtaining necessary funds and in-kind resources. A couple sponsors used their own income towards supporting sponsees, but for the most part sponsors turned to their community to raise money. One sponsor group organized a screening of a documentary about refugee resettlement, an event which in itself raised all the required funds sponsors would need. One member of the sponsor group described:

And we were expecting, I don't remember how many, but we ended up having to bring in more seats. We had a much bigger response than we had expected. The community just came out in tremendous numbers to watch the film, and we asked for donations. And, you know, I think we made like, \$5,000.

Sponsors also had considerable success reaching out to their individual social networks and asking friends and acquaintances directly for donations. Here, there was some potential for burnout over time, as friends could become less willing to provide donations for subsequent sponsorships. However, this was only described once by a sponsor who had been a part of at least ten different Ukrainian parolee sponsorships (which required raising additional funds for airfare outside of the \$2,425) and was not a phenomenon described by those having undertaken only two sponsorships.

Communities were also extremely important in providing other, non-financial forms of support. Sponsors reached out to sponsees' co-ethnic or linguistic communities to assist primarily in translating and interpreting during important conversations and appointments. These community relationships often mobilized into full-fledged friendships for sponsees, providing them a vital source of support and cultural connection. One sponsor group went to a local African grocer to ask if anyone there would be willing to help with translating between themselves and a sponsee; the man that volunteered ended up knowing the sponsee because they had lived in the same refugee camp as children. Another sponsor group reached out to the Arabic-speaking community for assistance with interpretation and ended up finding two Arabic-speaking close friends for their sponsee, who sponsors described as somewhat isolated due to her extremely limited English capabilities. Non-co-ethnic community members were also useful resources for sponsors. One sponsor cited that they had received valuable guidance from a community member, who ran a non-profit focused on helping disadvantaged individuals, when navigating social services. A different sponsor group used their connections with a local university to secure temporary housing and a seasonal job for sponsees. A third sponsor said that several of his friends who were landlords offered to rent to sponsees at reduced rates.

Mobilizing sponsor social capital for tasks such as soliciting donations or securing interpretation is explicitly encouraged by Welcome Corps (Welcome Corps n.d.). However, some sponsors went beyond these stated uses for social capital and leveraged relationships with key administrators or government officials to assist in fulfilling core sponsorship services. These strategic contacts acted as sources of knowledge and guidance, or as individuals to whom sponsors could appeal when they encountered difficulties. For example, one sponsor group had a pre-existing relationship with an individual in their state's Office of New Americans. This contact proved helpful when the sponsor group were unable to get their sponsee a state ID because the DMV kept insisting that the PSO they were working with was not on the DMV's list of designated refugee resettlement agencies. They wrote to this individual to ask for assistance, who reached out to the DMV to get their PSO added to the list. Had this relationship not existed, the sponsor group likely would have faced significantly more difficulty resolving this issue. In other cases, sponsors sought to raise awareness and develop new strategic relationships to facilitate their work. One sponsor group, in conjunction with two other sponsor groups in the area, held a workshop raising awareness about refugee resettlement in their community, where a representative from the local state Attorney General's office attended and offered to advocate on behalf of the sponsor group when they encountered difficulties navigating social services and other state agencies. Another sponsor succinctly sums up this strategy: "First, you have to be a squeaky wheel. And you have to find the person in those big agencies, in those big bureaucracies, that has a little bit more power, that can intervene for you." While this method of using social capital is not mentioned by Welcome Corps (in fact, one sponsor even noted that sponsors are less likely to have these relationships by virtue of their inexperience in refugee resettlement), several sponsors either had or developed these social connections to exploit.

### Lacking Guidance and Information-Sharing

While some sponsors had pre-existing “resettlement knowledge” from previous involvement in other sponsorship initiatives, other sponsors were coming into sponsorship having never worked with refugees before. These sponsors often felt that they were stumbling somewhat blindly into resettlement and were not provided adequate guidance by Welcome Corps. One sponsor stated that, “They tell you, you have to do this and this and this, but they don't tell you how to do it, go through it.” For sponsors, much of what they learned about how to better navigate resettlement were “little gems” learned through “word of mouth” instead of being provided to them in a training module or informational materials, and some viewed this as problematic. Not only did it make sponsors' lives harder, but lacking information when attempting to navigate resettlement could translate into sponsors making mistakes, and thus serious negative consequences for sponsees (Agrawal 2019). It was not uncommon for sponsors to express some level of frustration—or at the very least confusion—that they were provided with insufficient and vague guidance regarding how to navigate their responsibilities. As one sponsor remarked, “It's just very trial and error. And it seems so odd, because you'd think that all of this knowledge would be written down somewhere.” By “knowledge”, this sponsor here is alluding to the specialized resettlement knowledge that caseworkers, as well as previous sponsors, have primarily developed through experience. Especially given the fact that other sponsor groups were also confronting many of the very same problems, sponsors expressed a wish that this “resettlement knowledge” was accumulated and provided to new sponsors so that not every sponsor had to keep “reinventing the wheel,” as one participant phrased it.

The mandatory pairing of sponsor groups with PSOs helped to provide sponsors some of this resettlement expertise that they may have lacked. PSOs were viewed by sponsors as

organizations that “have decades of experience with refugee resettlement” and that understood the particularities of the resettlement process. As such, PSOs were able to provide sponsor groups with specialized knowledge that may not have been available elsewhere. One sponsor consulted their PSO when a sponsee was about to be offered a job but had not yet received his Employment Authorization Document (EAD) stating he could legally work. The PSO pointed sponsors to the specific legal provision stating that refugees had authorization to work without the need to present an EAD card, and the sponsee used that information to successfully land the job. PSOs also provided guidance on the extent of sponsors’ responsibilities. PSOs gave sponsors checklists of tasks they needed to complete before the end of the 90-day sponsorship period as well as checklists of items to have on hand prior to sponsees’ arrival. When sponsees were contemplating migrating to another part of the U.S., PSOs advised sponsors on what was expected of them if sponsees ultimately decided to move. In this way, PSOs were not just providing expertise, but they were also translating and interpreting Welcome Corps guidance for sponsor groups, as Welcome Corps had nearly no direct involvement with sponsor groups after sponsees arrived.

Sponsors generally reported satisfaction with the assistance provided to them by PSOs, but there were instances where this assistance was limited or not applicable. Some sponsor groups were assigned to PSOs in entirely different states. This had consequences for guidance regarding social services, as public benefits, health insurance, and other social assistance programs differ in their administration from state to state, and often from county to county. In these cases, PSOs had no experience navigating that particular state’s or county’s social services and could only provide limited assistance to their assigned sponsor groups. Other sponsors reported that their PSO contacts were overburdened with other work tasks and were slow to respond to sponsor groups, forcing sponsors to have to problem-solve on their own. Furthermore, the assistance provided by PSOs

varied tremendously between organizations, such that while some groups received very robust guidance, other groups received only nominal support. These limitations meant that PSOs were utilized as resources primarily when sponsors encountered more peculiar or extreme obstacles; when it came to the day-to-day problem-solving of sponsorship, sponsors typically chose to try and work things out themselves.

Several sponsors mobilized to fill these gaps in guidance: they sought to share their “resettlement knowledge” with other sponsor groups through developing informational resources and forming information-sharing networks. For example, I interviewed two sponsor groups in upstate New York who provided assistance to each other and also helped other sponsor groups. The first of the two groups to welcome sponsees sent their completed application to the second group, who used it as a point of reference for their own application. When the second group welcomed a father and daughter from Venezuela, one of the group members maintained a daily diary of his various tasks and responsibilities. This sponsor described that this diary would serve both as a resource for their own group should they want to take on a subsequent sponsorship as well as a resource for a third local sponsor group that was in the process of applying to Welcome Corps. Through developing and sharing information, these sponsor groups gleaned best practices from previous groups and then added to and further developed this information for use by later groups. Some PSOs also recognized the value in facilitating information-sharing between sponsor groups and organized opportunities to do so. Two PSOs held designated workshops or video calls where sponsor groups from all over the country could share resources and compare notes with each other as well as receive guidance from PSO staff; sponsors recalled these forums as being quite helpful. However, when one PSO experienced a drop in funding, they were forced to cease these information-sharing sessions. A sponsor stepped in, deciding to take over hosting the weekly

calls so as to preserve this valuable avenue for disseminating information. As these examples show, sponsors took initiative to create additional avenues for both learning from other sponsor groups as well as sharing best practices they had developed during their sponsorship experience.

### *Sponsorship as a Relationship*

#### Relationships and Emotions as Motivation

Research on sponsors in Canada has found that positive emotions are instrumental in motivating and sustaining involvement with sponsorship (Phillimore et al. 2021). The sponsors I interviewed echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that they continued to be engaged in sponsorship because it was a “rewarding” and “fulfilling” experience for sponsors. In addition to positive emotions, positive relationships between sponsors and those they welcomed was often cited as an important factor that motivated sponsors’ continued involvement with sponsorship. Through the process of welcoming and supporting newcomers, sponsors would develop deep, affectionate bonds with them. Many sponsors described that sponsees became “part of [their] family”; one sponsor described that for another member of her sponsor group, their sponsee had become like her first grandchild. These friendship and familial-like relationships motivated sponsors to continue helping sponsees even after their formal obligations concluded. One sponsor remarked that,

I don't think there's a sponsor who's been very involved...that is backing away [from sponsees] just **because of the power of the relationships**; they're wanting to help...Welcome Corps is so great about like, hey, you do it for the three months, and then you're kind of off the hook. **But yet, if it works out well, you're not off the hook.** The friendships are solidified. **You're part of a community you want to keep helping.** (author’s emphasis)

This sponsor is noting that the continued assistance sponsors provide in their capacity as friends after the sponsorship period ends is not accidental, but is rather an anticipated byproduct. Part of

the stated goal of Welcome Corps and other private sponsorship initiatives is to facilitate community connections, both between sponsors and sponsees and between sponsees and their larger resettlement communities (Welcome Corps 2024a). While programmatic guidance states that sponsors' responsibilities only need last 90 days, the bonds that sponsorship forms between sponsors and sponsees—which the program encourages—motivate sponsors to continue providing support past this explicit deadline.

The flip side of this is that when sponsorship experiences are not positive—when there are instances of intense conflict, disagreement, or difficulty—sponsors have little incentive to continue in the work. Several of those I interviewed cited difficult initial sponsorship experiences as reasons that they were not going to take on a subsequent sponsorship. One sponsor group had been supporting a Syrian family for about four months when, after a disagreement between the father of the family and the sponsor group, the whole family packed up all their belongings into a car and moved to join relatives in Canada. Their sponsors described being quite offended that they would do that without talking to them first, especially because one of the sponsors had just co-signed a lease on an apartment with them. This negative experience led the sponsors to swear off future sponsorship opportunities for nearly a year, only changing their mind and putting in another sponsorship application after President Trump was re-elected and it seemed as if refugee resettlement might disappear for good. Another sponsor group, who was in the midst of their second sponsorship when I interviewed them, stated that had their second sponsorship experience been their first, they likely would not have continued because they were experiencing so much difficulty. Sponsors are, after all, volunteers; what keeps them in this work is the sense of enjoyment or satisfaction they derive from it, and when this enjoyment ceases to exist, so too does sponsor involvement.

Conflict or difficulty in sponsorship, if it happened before sponsees were sufficiently established, could lead to sponsorship breakdown. Sponsorship breakdown happens when sponsors cease providing support to sponsees before all of their obligations have been fulfilled (Arnault and Merali 2019). While there were no instances of sponsorship breakdown in my sample, many sponsors mentioned instances where it became difficult to continue supporting sponsees—where sponsor breakdown might have occurred. One sponsor described that a member of their sponsor group secured a sponsee a job at a family member’s business, but the sponsee quit just a few weeks later. This woman had leveraged her relationship with her family to help out a sponsee, and when the sponsee quit, she took it as a personal offense and stopped her involvement with the sponsor group. Fortunately, other members of the sponsor group were there to pick up the slack so this event never escalated to full-scale sponsorship breakdown. However, were a sponsee to commit a similar perceived transgression against all members of a sponsor group, sponsorship breakdown may very well be the result. Another sponsor group described that sentiments of distrust and ungratefulness from those they sponsored made the entire experience extremely unpleasant and difficult to the point of contemplating quitting. Their sponsees repeatedly disregarded their advice, they accused their sponsors of keeping funds meant for the sponsees for themselves, and they insisted sponsors “had” to do certain tasks for them. This group told me that, had they not been worried about what might happen to young children of the sponsees if they were not sufficiently established, the entire sponsor group may very well have stopped supporting sponsees after only a month and a half, well before the 90-day sponsor commitment was through.

The co-existence of intimate, friendship relationships with dynamics of service provision presents both opportunities and challenges. When these deep bonds develop, service provision becomes a labor of love, rather than a responsibility; this then encourages sponsors to continue in

their roles. However, if relationships sour, service provision can become an unwelcome burden that sponsors—as volunteers, and not employees—may choose to abandon, to the utter detriment of sponsees.

### Misaligned Priorities, Disagreement, and Paternalism

Conflict between sponsors and sponsees was not a rare occurrence, it was a daily challenge that had to be continuously confronted. Most frequently, these disagreements took the form of misaligned priorities: where sponsors felt it was best to proceed in one way but sponsees wished to follow a different path. Sometimes these were only small, honest disagreements; for example, sponsors were hoping that sponsees would learn how to use their local bus system, but sponsees did not want to. Other times, these were fundamentally conflicting opinions about the trajectory of sponsees' lives. Many of these conflicts centered around secondary migration: when sponsees decided to leave the area in which sponsors lived to be closer to family or co-ethnic communities, or to pursue economic opportunities. For instance, one sponsor described that the Congolese couple his sponsor group was supporting had decided to outmigrate to another state with a vibrant Congolese community because they felt somewhat isolated in their current resettlement community. This decision came despite the fact that this sponsor group had been supporting this couple for multiple months and had reaffirmed its commitment to continuing to support them in the future. This disagreement brings to light a fundamental knowledge differential between sponsors and sponsees: while sponsors are of course more knowledgeable about the resettlement community and how to succeed within it, sponsees know best what their own needs are and what might best serve them in resettlement (Lenard 2019). In the case mentioned previously, it is true that the sponsor believes the couple will be better off not moving and leveraging the existing

support system they have built up over the past few months. At the same time, it is also true that co-ethnic networks are hugely important for refugee mental health and feelings of belongingness (Song, Corcoran, and Zahnow 2024); thus, these sponsees likely believe they will benefit more from moving and accessing these networks than staying put and remaining isolated from their co-ethnic community. The different perspectives and knowledge held by sponsors and sponsees creates the sponsorship relationship as one where contrasting opinions and disagreements are likely to emerge.

This misalignment in priorities can also be explained by differences in how sponsees and sponsors, and by extension the state, conceptualize and define integration. Sponsors are primarily focused on fulfilling their obligations towards sponsees, as prescribed by the Welcome Corps program. These obligations center around fulfilling sponsees' immediate needs like obtaining documentation and securing housing. Sponsees, however, were frequently focused on other priorities, one of which was maintaining and/or rebuilding the sense of community they had in their home countries and the countries to which they fled. As described before, one way in which sponsees did this was through secondary migration. Another way in which this happened was through engaging with co-ethnic or cultural communities. For example, one sponsee was heavily involved with mobilizing support for fellow sub-Saharan African LGBTQ+ identifying refugees still in Africa. His sponsors expressed to me that while this work was important and he should of course remain involved, they were worried that it would take up a lot of the time and energy that they believed he should spend on rebuilding his life in the U.S.. Another sponsee had been heavily involved with community organizing in his refugee camp and upon arriving in his resettlement community, set out to become heavily involved in the co-ethnic community located there. His sponsors also expressed a worry that these community involvement efforts were eclipsing other,

more important resettlement tasks. For sponsors, their designated resettlement tasks were the priority, and sponsees spending time or resources elsewhere was seen as a *mistake* or a *waste*; however, for sponsees, resettlement tasks were less important than developing and maintaining a sense of social connection. Welcome Corps—and to a larger extent, the U.S. refugee resettlement program—generates this misalignment by prioritizing the fulfillment of immediate needs and largely disregarding social connection and other avenues for integration in how it defines resettlement benchmarks.

When disagreement between sponsors and sponsees occurred, it was common for paternalism to emerge. For the most part, this was in the form of paternalistic sentiments, not paternalistic action. When sponsors and sponsees held conflicting views about how to proceed, several sponsors insisted they “knew best” and refused to acknowledge sponsees’ opinions as valid. If sponsees did not comply with sponsors’ advice—if they insisted on the supremacy of their knowledge and disregarded that of sponsors—sponsors would often become frustrated and look down upon sponsees. One sponsor described that,

In the place [sponsees] ended up renting, they kept getting in trouble because they weren't following the rules, they were like, throwing all their garbage right outside the front door. You know, even though we [the sponsor group] explained all this to them, everything that we explained was sort of like, we know better. We know better.

In only a few cases, paternalistic sentiments transformed into full-fledged paternalistic action. In cases of secondary migration—when sponsees decided to move despite the objections of sponsors—sponsors viewed this as somewhat of a betrayal and often ended up cutting off any continuing support to sponsees. If sponsees had stayed in their original resettlement communities and heeded the advice of sponsors, sponsors would have remained committed to assisting them informally as long as needed; however, because sponsees decided to ignore sponsors’ guidance and move,

sponsors responded by no longer supporting them. It is important to note that in both of these specific cases, sponsees chose to move after the conclusion of the three months sponsorship period, and therefore sponsors no longer had any explicit obligations towards them. Nevertheless, given that sponsors would have continued assisting sponsees if they had chosen not to move—if they had followed sponsor advice—these examples demonstrate that sponsor assistance was conditional on sponsees complying with the wishes of sponsors. In another case, a sponsor imposed their will onto a sponsee, leading to considerable animosity between themselves and the sponsee. This sponsor described that the individual she is supporting has repeatedly expressed her wish to start working to support herself. However, the sponsor believes that instead of working right away, the sponsee should focus on improving her English and finding childcare for her young son. Rather than assisting the sponsee in her search for employment, this sponsor is impeding her actions and effectively preventing her from accessing employment, leading to much frustration on the sponsee’s part. This was despite this same sponsor mentioning earlier in our conversation the importance of sponsors learning to “accompany” sponsees rather than “leading” or “saving” them.

Even outside of specific instances of conflict, paternalism influenced how sponsors perceive sponsees. Sponsors privileged sponsees who were seen as “compliant” or whose opinions aligned with those of sponsors. In particular, sponsees who showed initiative to start working or learn English—two of sponsors’ primary tasks—were viewed positively. One sponsor stated that his sponsor group was “lucky” that the sponsee they received was motivated to search for employment almost immediately. Another sponsor was “very impressed” that the father of the sponsee family they were supporting was quite motivated to learn English. Moreover, sponsors lauded sponsees who were reluctant to utilize welfare and villainized those who were perceived as overly reliant. A sponsee was described as “conscientious” because he did not want to rely on food stamps and

preferred to spend his own money. One sponsor described that the members of his group were “rubbed the wrong way” because one sponsee was thought to be spending his free time looking for ways to get additional cash assistance or food stamps instead of searching for a job. In sponsors’ eyes, not relying on public benefits signified adaptability and initiative, two qualities that facilitated easier fulfillment of resettlement objectives, while overreliance indicated laziness. These statements also illuminate that many sponsors fell victim to the same problematic discourse surrounding refugees, and immigrants more generally, that proliferates throughout society. By promoting English learning, valuing an initiative to work, and negatively viewing those who relied on public benefits, sponsors implicitly (and in one case, explicitly) subscribed to rhetoric that refugees had to give back to their new communities and not “drink from the well without contributing,” as one sponsor phrased it.

In contrast to these more paternalistic approaches, one sponsor group (or rather, two members of one sponsor group) adopted a very distinctly mutualistic approach. Mutualistic approaches to sponsorship are characterized by viewing sponsees as equal partners in the resettlement process and respecting their opinions, knowledge, and decisions (Haugen, Wills, and Lenard 2020). From the very outset, these two specific sponsors consistently affirmed the collaborative nature of sponsorship and respected sponsees’ decisions. When other members of their sponsor group were searching for employment options for sponsees prior to their arrival, these two sponsors reminded the rest of their group that before beginning the employment search, first the sponsor group should ask sponsees where they *want* to work. Later in their sponsorship, the sponsees this group was supporting decided to move across the country. The sponsor group had a substantial amount of money that they had raised which had not yet been spent. The sponsees wished to spend this money on a car, but the sponsor group did not think this was wise; they felt

the funds should instead be used on rent for an apartment. The two more mutualistic sponsors in the group respected the sponsees' decision to buy a car and managed to convince the other members of the group to send the funds for the sponsees to use as they wished.

The sponsorship relationship, as it is constructed, privileges the perspectives and wishes of sponsors and encourages paternalism. Programmatic guidance counsels sponsors to focus on the fulfillment of core sponsorship obligations which, while incredibly important to facilitating positive integration outcomes, often do not align with what sponsees view as priorities in resettlement. Furthermore, as scholars note, sponsorship relationships are fundamentally unequal power dynamics: sponsors, endowed with knowledge and social capital by virtue of their positions as resettlement community members, are entrusted with supporting vulnerable newcomers with few resources in their new communities apart from their sponsors upon which to rely (Lenard 2016). Paternalistic sentiments and approaches are encouraged by this unequal power dynamic, while more mutualistic approaches require sponsors to reject this inequitable relationship and actively choose to center the agency, wishes, and expertise of sponsees.

## **Policy Implications**

The findings from this research have far-ranging implications not just for the Welcome Corps program, but for sponsorship initiatives and refugee resettlement more generally.

### *Recommendations for Welcome Corps*

Welcome Corps learned from a lot of the problems seen in refugee sponsorship programs elsewhere, as well as in previous U.S. sponsorship initiatives, and incorporated this learning into how it structured the program. Despite this, there were still instances of issues in how Welcome Corps created and administered sponsorship relationships. Welcome Corps should make the following improvements to its program structure and implementation to improve both the experiences of sponsors and the resettlement outcomes of sponsees.

#### Improved Guidance and Training for Sponsors

A commonly-observed trend in other sponsorship models is that sponsors consistently lacked guidance or training regarding their responsibilities prior to resettlement (Elcioglu 2023; Agrawal 2019). When sponsors lack an understanding of the extent of their obligations and how to fulfill them, this not only leads to difficulty for sponsors but can also lead to dire consequences for sponsees (Agrawal 2019). In the Welcome Corps program, this trend was largely minimized. The pairing of sponsor groups with PSOs provided sponsors with a valuable source of technical assistance to which they can always turn. Furthermore, the precursor sponsor initiatives of Sponsor Circles, Uniting for Ukraine, and community/co-sponsorship meant that several sponsors involved in Welcome Corps already had significant experience navigating refugee resettlement and sponsorship.

Where sponsors ran into severe difficulties was not in regard to service provision but instead related to how they constructed relationships with sponsees. Sponsors frequently adopted paternalistic views, minimizing the wishes and desires of sponsees and maintaining the supremacy of sponsor know-how. This happened despite Welcome Corps guidance explicitly stating sponsorship should be a “collaboration” between sponsors and newcomers—that is, sponsors should adopt mutualistic approaches. To facilitate sponsors adopting these approaches, existing training should be expanded to include modules on implicit bias, cross-cultural sensitivity, and affirming sponsee agency. Such training would help sponsors to challenge their assumptions regarding newcomers and encourage sponsors to view sponsorship as a collaborative, rather than unilateral, process. The one pair of mutualistic-minded sponsors that I talked to even mentioned this, stating that they wished the other members of their sponsor group would have received cross-cultural and implicit bias training as they had done through their previous involvement with Peace Corps. Furthermore, these trainings should be required for all sponsor group members, not solely lead sponsors. This will ensure that all sponsors are aware of mutualistic mindsets and can remind the other members of their sponsor group to center these approaches should they start to exhibit paternalistic attitudes.

### Institutionalized Opportunities for Information Sharing

Many sponsors sought out opportunities for information-sharing with other sponsor groups, either through sessions organized by certain PSOs or on their own. Sponsors were motivated to do this in part to help others learn from their experiences, but also to glean best practices and resettlement tips from others to improve their own sponsorship experiences. As sponsors often did not have previous experience with resettlement, opportunities for information-

sharing with other sponsor groups were cited as hugely important in preparing sponsors and resolving problems encountered in resettlement. Given this finding, Welcome Corps should institutionalize avenues for information-sharing between sponsor groups. For example, Welcome Corps could organize regular workshops with relevant stakeholders, including sponsors, PSO staff, and U.S. government officials to allow for sharing of best practices between sponsor groups as well as between PSOs and sponsor groups. Such convenings would also give Welcome Corps administrators the opportunity to receive feedback about program implementation. Some PSOs offered weekly calls with other sponsors to allow for sharing tips and tricks, but these valuable forums were vulnerable to changes in funding and were not universally offered. Welcome Corps could require PSOs to offer these weekly calls (or some other alternative) and provide consistent and increased funding so that PSOs can do so without worrying about funding. Furthermore, Welcome Corps should develop new informational materials that discuss individual sponsor experiences and accumulate tips and advice from sponsors. For example, Welcome Corps could develop something similar to the daily diary created by one sponsor I interviewed. Such resources would not only help other sponsors learn from the mistakes and accomplishments of other sponsor groups, but they would also help to orient new sponsors to the realities and the day-to-day experiences of sponsorship. Instead of sponsors having to repeatedly solve many of the same problems entirely on their own, these resources and avenues for information-sharing would make it so that sponsors can draw on the experience and accumulated expertise of other sponsors to more easily and effectively solve these same problems.

## Improved Monitoring of Sponsorships

As pointed out in my findings, sponsors, as volunteers, often only remain involved in sponsorship as long as they have positive sponsorship experiences. This means that in instances of difficulty or conflict in sponsorship—where sponsors and sponsees disagree, where sponsors may feel displeased or even insulted by sponsees, or where sponsors encounter extreme hardship in accomplishing resettlement tasks—sponsors may no longer have any motivation to continue in the work and decide to either abandon sponsees or not take on subsequent sponsorships. This potential for sponsorship breakdown is exacerbated due to Welcome Corps’s lackluster monitoring mechanisms for sponsorship. In sponsorship, sponsors are entrusted with the full responsibility—and therefore discretion—to ensure sponsees receive core sponsorship services. The only required reporting for sponsors are 30- and 90-day reports, which ask sponsors about the fulfillment of core sponsorship duties to that point. These reports do not require any input from sponsees, so sponsors may exclude any instances of conflict and simply not report sponsorship breakdown. Sponsees are able to report any problems they encountered with sponsors in surveys at the 30-day, 6-month, and 12-month marks, but these surveys are optional, not required. Furthermore, even where sponsees encounter issues with sponsors, these issues are likely to go unreported. Sponsees often feel gratitude or indebtedness towards sponsors, meaning sponsors are less likely to report instances of conflict (Agrawal 2019; Arnault and Merali 2019). Moreover, due to how sponsor-sponsee relationships are constructed, sponsees rarely have any sort of resources or social connection they can draw on besides those provided by sponsors; thus, sponsees may be afraid to raise issues directly with their sponsors out of fear of jeopardizing the existing, but imperfect, support they have. Even if sponsees were to be willing to report instances of conflict, they would have to wait for one of the designated time periods—30 days, six months, or one year—to raise any issues with

the assistance they receive from sponsors, meaning that any intervention that would happen as a result of these reporting mechanisms would likely be untimely and inadequate.

Welcome Corps should improve their monitoring and reporting mechanisms to remedy these gaps. Firstly, Welcome Corps should require sponsees to fill out these periodic reports and should also add another report to be filled out at the end of the 90-day sponsorship period. Secondly, Welcome Corps should require PSOs, as the primary reporting mechanism for sponsors, to also act as a reporting mechanism for sponsees that can be utilized at any point during sponsorship. This way, if sponsees encounter any issues in the periods in between mandated reports, they can report these issues directly to PSOs who can then address them. Moreover, by connecting PSOs directly to sponsees, PSOs can educate sponsees on their rights as resettled refugees and reassure them of the importance of raising any issues they encounter with sponsor support, which will hopefully encourage sponsees to report problems rather than suffering in silence. Importantly, if Welcome Corps is going to further rely on PSOs to act as a reporting mechanism for sponsees as well as sponsors, Welcome Corps needs to better fund PSOs so that they can provide this valuable service. If Welcome Corps does not want to provide such funding to PSOs, Welcome Corps itself should develop comparable reporting mechanisms for sponsees to replace the additional PSO services described above.

### *Recommendations for U.S. Refugee Resettlement*

This study also uncovers several issues with the U.S. refugee resettlement system more generally, as experienced by sponsors in Welcome Corps.

Firstly, this research provides further evidence that the existing R&P service period is too short and should be lengthened. Many of the sponsors interviewed for this research, either

implicitly or explicitly, expressed that 90 days was not nearly enough time for sponsees to become truly self-sufficient in their new communities. This finding echoes what refugee advocates have been arguing for decades regarding the R&P program's 90-day cutoff. Such a short period of support drives refugees into low-wage and low-opportunity "survival jobs" rather than allowing them time to acquire U.S. credentials, re-train, or learn English, leading to overall worse employment outcomes (Lumley-Sapanski 2021; Kreisberg, de Graauw, and Gleeson 2024). The 90-day cutoff also drives resettlement caseworkers to focus primarily on the fulfillment of prescribed tasks rather than fostering other important, but not prescribed, integration markers like social connections or cultural competency (Fee 2019). Moreover, trauma and other adverse mental health effects from refugees' migration experiences may not manifest until after this 90-day period, leaving refugees without robust support systems when they are most in need. The R&P service period should be extended to at minimum six months so that refugees have adequate time to adjust to their new communities and set themselves up for success, rather than survival. Such a change would also require the State Department increasing the R&P funding amount from \$2,425 to an adequate amount to fund R&P services for six months instead of three; the exact amount of that funding increase should be determined by extensive consultation with caseworkers doing on-the-ground work at RROs.

Secondly, this research provides evidence for an improved matching process between refugees and their resettlement communities. Several sponsors wished that Welcome Corps had been more purposeful in matching sponsees to sponsor groups, as doing so would prevent instances of secondary migration and improve sponsees' access to co-ethnic networks. A few sponsees who were resettled had family members in other parts of the U.S. and ended up moving to be closer to them. Other sponsees felt isolated from those who spoke their language or were from their culture

in their original resettlement communities and migrated to be closer to cultural and linguistic communities. Purposeful matching of sponsees close to family members or co-ethnic communities would remove the need for secondary migration, and therefore would prevent sponsees from having to leave their sponsors and the support systems they have built up in their original resettlement communities while also providing sponsees with social connection from family members and co-ethnic networks. USRAP acknowledges this, requiring that any arriving refugees who have U.S. ties—family members, friends, or other acquaintances that they list on their applications for resettlement—are placed with a RRO located near that U.S. tie. However, it is important to note that U.S. ties do not have to provide any support—social, financial, or emotional—to refugees, and it is not uncommon for U.S. ties to refuse to assist in helping resettle others (Settle In 2024). Instead of this U.S. tie model, USRAP and Welcome Corps should ask refugees themselves where they wish to be resettled and take this into account. For those with U.S. ties, these individuals can choose whether they would like to be located close to them. For those without U.S. ties, these individuals can choose a place where there might be a strong co-ethnic community or lots of employment opportunities and low costs of living. Either way, a matching process that gives refugees themselves the agency to choose where they are resettled will minimize the disruption of secondary migration and facilitate better resettlement experiences for refugees, sponsees, and sponsors alike.

### *Private Sponsorship vs. State-Sponsored Resettlement*

This study finds that sponsors are consistently motivated to provide support above and beyond what they are asked to provide. If refugees resettled through private sponsorship are receiving more resources, time, and energy spent assisting them in resettlement, it is plausible that

these refugees may have better integration outcomes than refugees resettled through traditional refugee resettlement. While there is yet to be any evidence to this effect in the U.S. (as Welcome Corps is so new), there is much in the Canadian context. Multiple studies of government-assisted (GARs) and privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs) in Canada have found that PSRs had higher rates of employment, higher employment earnings, and lower incidence of social assistance than their government-assisted counterparts in the immediate period following their arrival, although this advantage did decrease significantly over time (Beiser 2003; IRCC 2016; Hynie et al. 2019; Kaida, Hou, and Stick 2020).<sup>3</sup>

Yet I would caution against using such trends as evidence in favor of expanding private sponsorship. If sponsorship is leading to better integration outcomes by virtue of the additional resources that sponsors have, we might instead think that the answer is not to rely more on sponsorship, but rather to better fund traditional refugee resettlement programs so that caseworkers are not as resource-constrained and can thus facilitate better integration outcomes. As this research shows, the primary danger with enlarging sponsorship is that it relies on sponsors—who dedicate voluntary labor—to assist refugees in accessing and claiming their rights. Sponsors’ assistance to sponsees and continued involvement in resettlement is conditional on their enjoyment of the work, whereas for caseworkers this is ensured as a function of employment. Relying on sponsors, a fluid and at-will work force, to ensure the long-term success of vulnerable newcomers can lead to sponsorship breakdown and disastrous outcomes for sponsees, or at the very least, can be difficult to sustain. Furthermore, as demonstrated in this study, sponsors often held paternalistic attitudes

---

<sup>3</sup> Scholars have also pointed out that this measurable difference could be due to the fact that more “vulnerable” refugees are prioritized to be selected as GARs, which leads to substantial demographic differences between GARs and PSRs. For example, Hynie et al. (2019) found that PSRs were more likely to have smaller family sizes, be higher educated, and have knowledge of one of Canada’s official languages as compared to GARs, all factors that play into the economic differences observed between GARs and PSRs.

towards sponsees, attitudes which may impact how sponsors deliver services, construct relationships with sponsees, and facilitate sponsee independence, and therefore influence integration outcomes. Simply by removing many of the constraints placed on caseworkers—through reducing heavy caseloads, better funding refugee resettlement agencies, and eliminating excessive paperwork burdens—you can achieve many of the positive aspects of sponsorship and avoid its downfalls.

This is not to say that sponsorship, and the involvement of private citizens in refugee resettlement, must disappear entirely. There are other potential benefits associated with sponsorship—such as better integrating refugees into communities—not studied here that may merit the continuation of these programs (Cureton et al. 2024). But enlarging sponsorship initiatives without placing additional resources into traditional resettlement risks substituting a long-standing, albeit imperfect, program, with a newer, and arguably more imperfect, program. Furthermore, enlarging private sponsorship continues the neoliberal trend of devolving what fundamentally is the state’s responsibility for refugee resettlement onto the shoulders of private organizations and private citizens. If sponsorship does remain, I argue that it must abide by the principle of additionality. That is, private sponsorship should exist alongside state-sponsored refugee resettlement programs and refugees resettled through sponsorship should not count towards state quotas for refugee resettlement. While Canada’s private sponsorship program abides by this principle of additionality, the Welcome Corps program does not. Furthermore, I argue that models of community sponsorship, where private citizens assist refugees in resettlement *in addition to* the assistance provided by caseworkers, are preferential to models of private sponsorship where responsibility for core resettlement services lies primarily with private citizens. Such sponsorship models allow private citizens to remain involved in refugee resettlement, and therefore preserve

the potential benefits associated with their involvement, without potentially compromising the quality of service provision to refugees.

### *Future Research Directions*

There still remain unanswered questions about sponsorship and its consequences that I cannot address simply because of the limitations of my sample, data, and research design. Thus, I recommend avenues for additional research that extend out of my work.

Firstly, my research very obviously lacks the perspectives of sponsees. Due to time constraints and the relative difficulty I faced recruiting sponsee participants, I had to limit my population of interest to sponsors. Consequently, I can only theorize about the effects that the actions and decisions sponsors take have on sponsees. Future research should investigate how the dynamics I observed within sponsorship, most notably sponsors' tendencies towards paternalism, affect sponsees' resettlement experiences and integration outcomes. From a purely normative standpoint, sponsors holding paternalistic attitudes and acting paternalistically are not desirable; such research would allow scholars to make evidence-based judgements about paternalism and its place in refugee resettlement.

Secondly, my research lacks the perspectives of staff at PSOs. PSO staff, particularly those who have both casework experience and experience working directly with private sponsor groups to provide technical assistance, can provide valuable insights as those who have knowledge of both state-sponsored and private sponsorship models of resettlement. Research with PSO staff would allow for further elaboration on the structural differences between sponsors and caseworkers as well as the observed differences between support provided by sponsors and that provided by

caseworkers. Moreover, PSO staff can make recommendations for improvements in the structure and function of the PSO-sponsor group and PSO-Welcome Corps relationships.

Thirdly, my research can only speak to the dynamics of matched sponsorships, not named ones. Named sponsorships, in that they require a sponsor group to designate a particular refugee for resettlement, often overlap pre-existing relationships. Naming is used extensively in the Canadian program as a pathway for family reunification, meaning that family members are often sponsored by other family members. Naming is also used heavily by particular communities to resettle refugees of similar national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic origins (Jedwab 2018). Both of these kinds of sponsor-sponsee relationships differ very much from the ones described in my research, and therefore the dynamics present may also differ tremendously. For example, family or community relationships may create feelings of community, loyalty, or similarity between sponsors and sponsees that protect against exploitation or sponsorship breakdown. Alternatively, these bonds may inflate the sentiments of indebtedness and gratitude between sponsors and sponsees, making these relationships rife for exploitation and sponsees unlikely to report any such experiences. Future research specifically on named sponsorships would illuminate the dynamics present in these relationships and allow for comparison to matched sponsorships.

## Conclusion

This study details how sponsors encounter, navigate, and contest sponsorship—both as a set of responsibilities and as a relationship—as it is constructed within the Welcome Corps program. When it came to fulfilling core sponsorship services, sponsors were largely successful, encountering only minor issues in fulfilling resettlement tasks. Sponsors, because they had negligible constraints on their time and resources, contested the stated boundaries of sponsorship to consistently provide additional support to sponsees. Moreover, sponsors went beyond written guidance to create strategies that facilitated and improved their ability to fulfill core sponsorship tasks: developing strategic relationships, sharing best practices amongst sponsor groups, and institutionalizing accumulated expertise. However, when it came to navigating sponsorship as a relationship, sponsors fell victim to structural issues. Because sponsors' labor is voluntary, when dynamics with sponsees became challenging sponsors were liable to potentially abandon sponsees, or at the very least, not renew their involvement with sponsorship. Furthermore, the narrowly-defined nature of sponsors' roles and differences in perspective and knowledge meant that sponsors were constantly at odds with sponsees, and sponsorship's unequal power dynamic meant that when these disagreements arose, sponsors tended towards paternalism.

Upon taking office on January 20th, 2025, President Trump swiftly paused all U.S. refugee resettlement programs, including Welcome Corps (The White House 2025). One month later, on February 26th, the Welcome Corps program was officially terminated (Welcome.US 2025). Despite the fact that this program no longer exists, the insights gleaned from this research are still extremely pertinent. The perspectives of sponsors are incredibly underrepresented in existing research on sponsorship; this research attempts to start filling this gap and understand sponsors' experiences when navigating their roles and responsibilities. Moreover, this research emphasizes

the role of program structure and guidance in facilitating, amplifying, or preventing specific trends in sponsorship, which will help to inform better policymaking on this topic.

If another, more refugee-friendly president takes office and restarts refugee resettlement, I foresee that private sponsorship will be leveraged yet again. Welcome Corps was created in part because of its ability to provide meaningful refuge to those in need without overwhelming an emaciated refugee resettlement infrastructure. After President Trump paused refugee resettlement upon taking office this January, many refugee resettlement agencies were forced to lay off staff and cut costs just like during the first Trump Administration, leading again to a weakened refugee resettlement sector. Just as the Biden administration turned to Welcome Corps and other sponsorship initiatives, I imagine that future administrations wishing to increase refugee resettlement will likely resurrect the Welcome Corps model. If—or rather when—that moment comes, the insights and recommendations generated from this research will be of the utmost importance.

## **Appendix**

### Interview Questions for Sponsors

1. Please tell me about how you got involved with the Welcome Corps program.
2. Please explain the process of how you came to be paired with your sponsee(s). Were you matched with them, or did you name them?
3. Did you have any worries or anxieties prior to resettlement? Please explain why or why not.
4. What were the main challenges, if any, you encountered during resettlement? How did you resolve these challenges?
5. Did you feel equipped to handle the challenges that came about during resettlement? If yes, why? If no, why not?
6. For approximately how long did you provide support to the refugee you sponsored? Why?
7. At the conclusion of the sponsorship period, would you describe the refugee(s) you sponsored as “self-sufficient”? Please explain.
8. Do you feel that you were “successful” in your role as a sponsor? If so, why? If no, why not?
9. What did your relationship with the refugee(s) you sponsored look like? Do you continue to maintain contact with them?

## References

- Ager, Alistair, and Alison Strang. 2008. "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2: 166–191. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>.
- Agrawal, Sandeep Kumar. 2019. "Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Programs: Experience of Syrian Refugees in Alberta, Canada." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20: 941–962. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0640-7>.
- Arnault, David St. and Noorfarah Merali. 2019. "Pathways for Refugees' Descent into Homelessness in Edmonton, Alberta: the Urgent Need for Policy and Procedural Change." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20: 1161–1179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00652-5>.
- Bier, David and Matthew La Corte. 2016. *Private refugee resettlement in US history*. Niskanen Center. Available at: [https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old\\_uploads/2016/04/PrivateRefugeeHistory.pdf](https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2016/04/PrivateRefugeeHistory.pdf)
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Cureton, Ashley, Betty C. Tonui, Fernanda Lima Cross, and Odessa Gonzalez-Benson. 2024. "'What's at stake?' An exploration on the merits and drawbacks of the Welcome Corps Program, a private sponsorship of refugees." *International Social Work* 0, no. 0: 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728241292051>.
- Darrow, Jessica. 2015. "The (Re)Construction of the U.S. Department of State's Reception and Placement Program by Refugee Resettlement Agencies." *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research* 6(1): 91–119. doi: 10.1086/680341.

- Darrow, Jessica. 2018. "Administrative Indentureship and Administrative Inclusion: Structured Limits and Potential Opportunities for Refugee Client Inclusion in Resettlement Policy Implementation." *Social Science Review* 92(1): 36–68.
- Elcioglu, Emine Fidan. 2023. "Neoliberal Fatigue: The Effects of Private Refugee Sponsorship on Canadians' Political Consciousness." *Critical Sociology* 49, no.1: 97–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211064924>.
- Fee, Molly. 2019. "Paper integration: The structural constraints and consequences of the US refugee resettlement program." *Migration Studies* 7(4): 477–495. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny016>.
- Fee, Molly. 2025. "Resettlement Knowledge: The Expertise of Service Providers." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 44(1): 126–142. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdae008>.
- Frazier, Emily and Micheline van Riemsdijk. 2021. "When 'Self-Sufficiency' Is Not Sufficient: Refugee Integration Discourses of US Resettlement Actors and the Offer of Refuge." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(3): 3113–3130. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa119>.
- Frazier, Emily and Paul Bose. 2023. "Federal Government Turns to Communities to Help Refugees Settle Into the U.S." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, October 23. <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/federal-government-turns-to-communities-to-help-refugees-settle-into-the-u-s>.
- Gonzalez Benzon, Odessa. 2016. "Refugee Resettlement Policy in an Era of Neoliberalization: A Policy Discourse Analysis of the Refugee Act of 1980." *Social Service Review* 90, no. 3: 515–549. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688613>.
- Halpern, Peggy. 2008. "Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency: An Exploratory Study of Approaches Used in Office of Refugee Resettlement Programs." *US Department of*

- Health and Human Services*. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/refugee-economic-self-sufficiency-exploratory-study-approaches-used-office-refugee-resettlement-0>.
- Hanley, Jill, Adnan Al Mhamied, Janet Cleveland, Oula Hajjar, Ghayda Hassan, Nicole Ives, Rim Khyar, and Michaela Hynie. 2018. "The Social Networks, Social Support and Social Capital of Syrian Refugees Privately Sponsored to Settle in Montreal: Indications for Employment and Housing During Their Early Experiences of Integration." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 50, no. 2: 123–148. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/700983>.
- Haugen, Stacey, Patti Tamara Lenard, and Emily Regan Wills. 2020. "Creating Canadians through Private Sponsorship." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53: 560–576 [doi:10.1017/S0008423920000244](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423920000244).
- Hynie, Michaela, Ashley Korn, and Dan Tao. 2016. "Social Context and Integration for Government Assisted Refugees in Ontario, Canada." In *After the Flight: The Dynamics of Refugee Settlement and Integration*, edited by Shiva Nourpanah and Morgan Potteet. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hynie, Michaela, Susan McGrath, Jonathan Bridekirk, Anna Oda, Nicole Ives, Jennifer Hyndman, Neil Arya, Yogendra B. Shakya, Jill Hanley, and Kwame McKenzie. 2019. "What Role Does Type of Sponsorship Play in Early Integration Outcomes? Syrian Refugees Resettled in Six Canadian Cities." *Refuge* 35, no. 2: 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064818ar>.
- IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada). 2016. "Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP)." <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/resettlement-programs.html>.

- IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada). 2017. “Canada’s Syrian commitments.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/about-refugee-system/welcome-syrian-refugees/canada-commitment.html>.
- IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada). 2021. “Internal Audit of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/audits/internal-audit-private-sponsorship-refugees-program.html>.
- IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada). 2023. “Notice – Supplementary Information for the 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2024-2026.html>.
- IRCC (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada). n.d. “How Canada’s refugee system works.” <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/about-refugee-system/how-system-works.html#integration> (accessed April 7, 2025).
- Jedwab, Jack. 2018. “GARS VS PSRs: Explaining Differences in Outcomes for Recent Refugees to Canada.” *Canadian Diversity* 15(2): 38–46.
- Kahil, Rula, Maleeha Iqbal, and Neda Maghbouleh. 2021. “Grandmothers Behind the Scenes: Subordinate Integration, Care Work, and Power in Syrian Canadian Refugee Resettlement.” *Refuge* 38(2): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40937>.
- Kaida, Lisa, Feng Hou, and Max Stick. 2019. “The Long-Term Economic Integration of Resettled Refugees in Canada: A Comparison of Privately Sponsored Refugees and

- Government-Assisted Refugees.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (9): 1687–1708. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2019.1623017.
- Kantor, Jodi and Catrin Einhorn. 2017. “Canadians Adopted Refugee Families for a Year. Then Came ‘Month 13.’” *New York Times*, March 25, 2017.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/25/world/canada/syrian-refugees.html>.
- Korteweg, Anna, Shauna Labman, and Audrey Macklin. 2023. “Humanitarian Bargains: Private Refugee Sponsorship and the Limits of Humanitarian Reason.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49(15): 3958-3975. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2023.2245149.
- Kreisberg, A. Nicole, Els de Graauw, and Shannon Gleeson. 2024. “Explaining Refugee Employment Declines: Structural Shortcomings in Federal Resettlement Support.” *Social Problems* 71(1): 271–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spab080>.
- Lamba, Navjot K. and Harvey Krahn. 2003. “Social capital and refugee resettlement: The social networks of refugees in Canada.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 4(3): 335–360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-003-1025-z>.
- Lenard, Patti Tamara. 2016. “Resettling Refugees: Is Private Sponsorship a Just Way Forward?” *Journal of Global Ethics* 12(3): 300–310.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2016.1247290>.
- Lenard, Patti Tamara. 2019. “How Do Sponsors Think about “Month 13”?” *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 35(2): 65-74. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064820ar>.
- Lim, Desiree. 2019. “Social Egalitarianism and the Private Sponsorship of Refugees.” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 50(3): 301–321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12294>.

- Linn, Emily Crane. 2022. “Examining the Impact of Community Sponsorship on Early Refugee Labor Market Outcomes in the United States.” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 10(2): 113–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/233150242211021>.
- Lumley-Sapanski, Audrey. 2021. “The Survival Job Trap: Explaining Refugee Employment Outcomes in Chicago and the Contributing Factors.” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(2): 2093–212. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez092>.
- Meissner, Doris. 2021. “The Afghanistan Exit Was Bad — Our Refugee Resettlement Plan Is No Better.” *The Hill*, November 10, 2021. <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/581605-the-afghanistan-exit-was-bad-our-refugee-resettlement-plan-is-no-better/>.
- ORR (Office of Refugee Resettlement). 2023. “Benefits for Refugees: Fact Sheet.” Accessed December 9, 2024. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/fact-sheet/refugee-benefits>.
- Oudshoorn, Abe, Sarah Benbow, and Matthew Meyer. 2019. “Resettlement of Syrian Refugees in Canada.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 21: 893–908. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00695-8>.
- Palmgren, Pei, Tomás Jiménez, Isabela Avila Breach, and Elisa Cascardi. 2025. “Brokering refugee integration: promises and pitfalls of refugee co-sponsorship in the United States.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 0: 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2025.2474619>.
- Phillimore, Jenny, Marisol Reyes-Soto, Gabriella D’Avino, and Natasha Nicholls. 2021. “‘I have Felt so Much Joy’: The Role of Emotions in Community Sponsorship of Refugees.” *Voluntas* 33: 386–396. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00349-3>.
- Prantl, Janine. 2023. “Community Sponsorships for Refugees and Other Forced Migrants: Learning from outside and inside the United States.” *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal* 37(3): 401-472.

- Refugee Welcome Collective. n.d. "Sponsorship Plan." Accessed December 9, 2024.  
<https://welcomecorps.org/resources/sponsorship-plan/>.
- Scoles, Cecilia. 2021. "Finding Housing for Resettled Refugees: Accounting for the Tangled Politics of Care in Canada's Private Refugee Sponsorship Program." Master's thesis, University of Ottawa.
- Settle In. 2024. "The Role of U.S. Ties in Refugee Resettlement." Updated October 10, 2024.  
<https://www.settlein.us/org/life-us/resettlement-services/role-us-ties-refugee-resettlement>.
- Song, Jinyeong, Jonathan Corcoran, and Renee Zahnow. 2024. "The Resettlement Journey: Understanding The Role of Social Connectedness on Well-being and Life Satisfaction among (Im)migrants and Refugees: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-024-02036-7>.
- Sponsor Circles. n.d. "The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans." Accessed December 9, 2024.  
<https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Sponsor-Circle-Program-for-Afghans-Application-Overview-1.pdf>.
- The White House. 2025. "Realigning the United States Refugee Program." January 20, 2025.  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/>.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). 2024. "Global Trends Report 2023." <https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends-report-2023>.
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). n.d. "Private Sponsorship Pathways." Accessed May 23, 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/long-term-solutions/complementary-pathways-admission-third-2>.

USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). n.d.-a. “Uniting For Ukraine.”  
Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://www.uscis.gov/ukraine>.

USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). n.d.-b. “Processes for Cubans,  
Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans.” Accessed December 10, 2024.  
<https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV>.

UK (United Kingdom) Home Office. 2021. “UK Refugee Resettlement: Policy Guidance.”  
Available online at:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/611cd056d3bf7f63b45df0ed/Resettlement  
\\_Policy\\_Guidance\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/611cd056d3bf7f63b45df0ed/Resettlement_Policy_Guidance_2021.pdf).

United States Department of State. 2022. “FY 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity for  
Reception and Placement Program.” [https://www.state.gov/fy-2023-notice-of-funding-  
opportunity-for-reception-and-placement-program/](https://www.state.gov/fy-2023-notice-of-funding-opportunity-for-reception-and-placement-program/).

United States Department of State. 2023. “Fact Sheet – Launch of Welcome Corps- Private  
Sponsorship of Refugees.” Press Release, [https://www.state.gov/launch-of-the-welcome-  
corps-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-2/](https://www.state.gov/launch-of-the-welcome-corps-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-2/).

Van Haren, Ian. 2021. “Canada’s Private Sponsorship Model Represents a Complementary  
Pathway for Refugee Resettlement.” *Migration Information Source*.  
<https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/aqw4m>.

Welcome Corps. 2023. “Journey Guide.” [https://welcomecorps.org/wp-  
content/uploads/welcome-corps-journey-guide.pdf](https://welcomecorps.org/wp-content/uploads/welcome-corps-journey-guide.pdf).

Welcome Corps. 2024a. “The Welcome Corps Celebrates First Year of New Service Opportunity  
for Americans to Privately Sponsor Refugees.” January 19, 2024.

<https://welcomecorps.org/the-welcome-corps-celebrates-first-year-of-new-service-opportunity-for-americans-to-privately-sponsor-refugees/>.

Welcome Corps. 2024b. “Private Sponsor Commitment.” <https://welcomecorps.org/wp-content/uploads/Private-Sponsor-Group-Commitment-Welcome-Corps.pdf>.

Welcome Corps. n.d. “Sponsorship Duties.” <https://welcomecorps.org/become-a-sponsor/sponsorship-duties/> (accessed April 7, 2025).

Welcome.US. 2025. “U.S. Refugee Admissions Program suspended until further notice, Welcome Corps terminated.” January 21, 2025, updated March 14, 2025.

<https://welcome.us/explainers/us-refugee-admissions-program-suspended-until-further-notice-welcome-corps-terminated>.