

# Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) to Improve Refugee Health

Ashley Fors<sup>1</sup>, Heather-Lyn Haley<sup>2</sup>, Vanessa Rooney<sup>2</sup>, Valerie Valant<sup>2</sup> and Andrew Wilbur<sup>2</sup>

University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Nursing<sup>1</sup> and University of Massachusetts Medical School<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction of Medical-Legal Partnership

What is Medical-Legal Partnership?

- A collaboration between health care providers and lawyers that aims to address social determinants of health

How does the partnership work?

- When a health care provider identifies a patient who has health-harming legal problems, the provider can refer the patient to Community Legal Aid which provides free legal counseling and representation to low income populations or those 60 years and older.
- Health care providers are trained in how to better screen for social and legal issues that impact the health of their patients.
- Legal professionals become better equipped to advocate for the basic rights of their patients on the basis of health.



What are some of the issues Community Legal Aid handle?

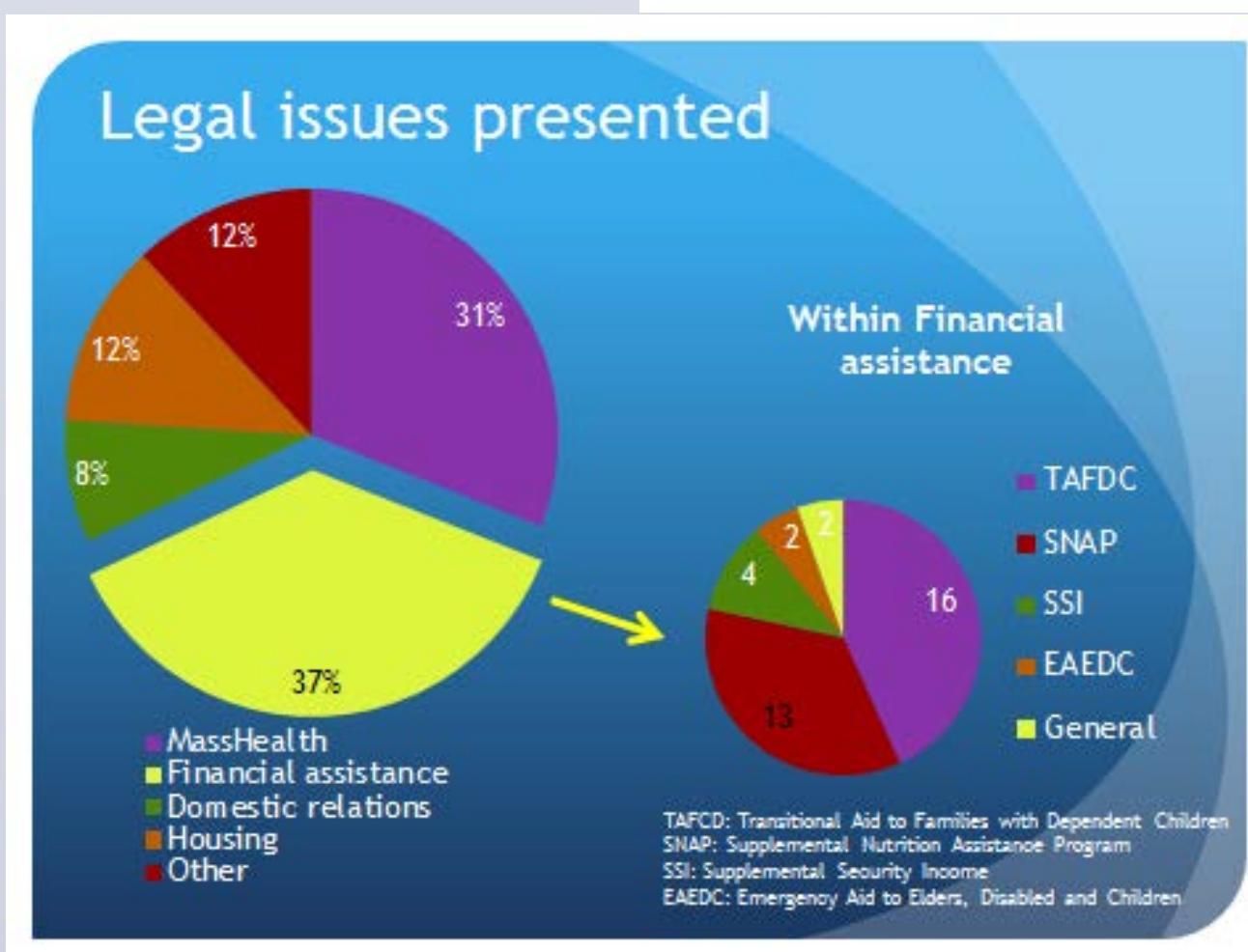
- Health care access, housing, food insecurity, domestic violence, immigration.

## Defining the Population of Focus

- Population: Refugees in Worcester who have legal needs.
- From October through December 2014, Worcester is projected to receive 151 (31.5%) of the 479 new refugee arrivals to Massachusetts. This makes Worcester the most common destination for new refugee arrivals to Massachusetts.

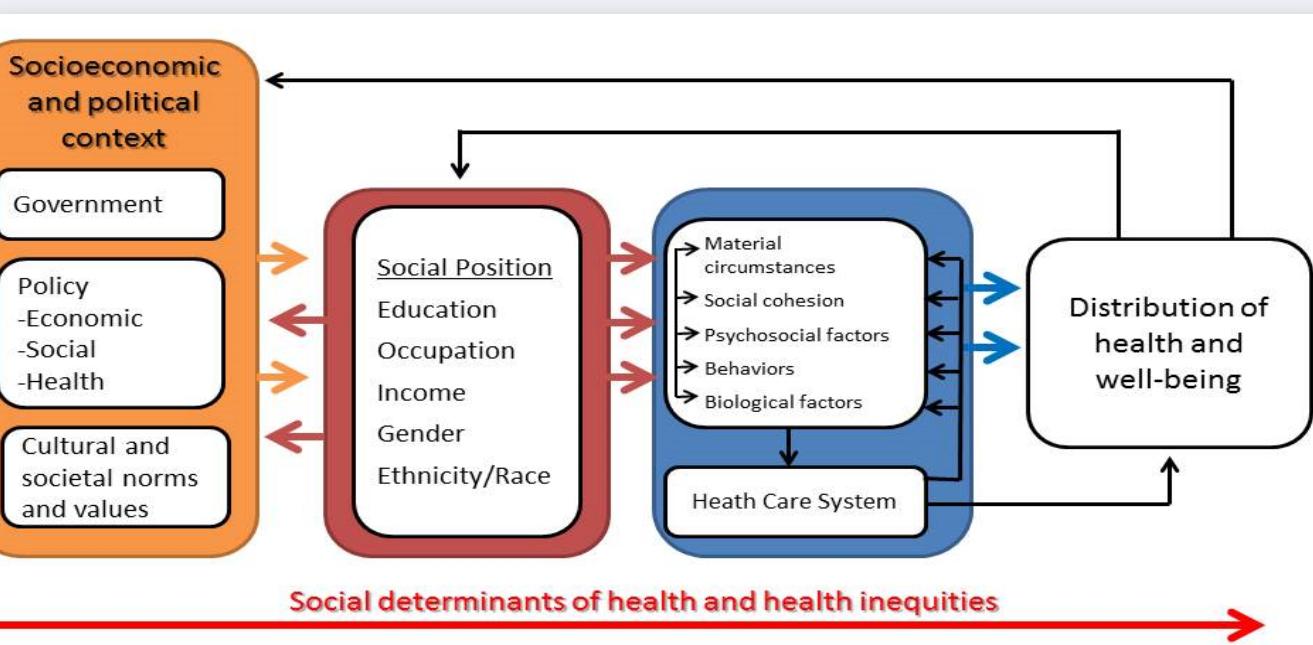
Country of Origin	Individuals
Iraq	71
Congo DR	38
Somalia	21
Bhutan	17
Central African Republic	3
Burma	1

Source: Welcoming Network handout from 9/25/14. Data compiled by the MA Office for Refugees and Immigrants.



## Social Determinants of Health

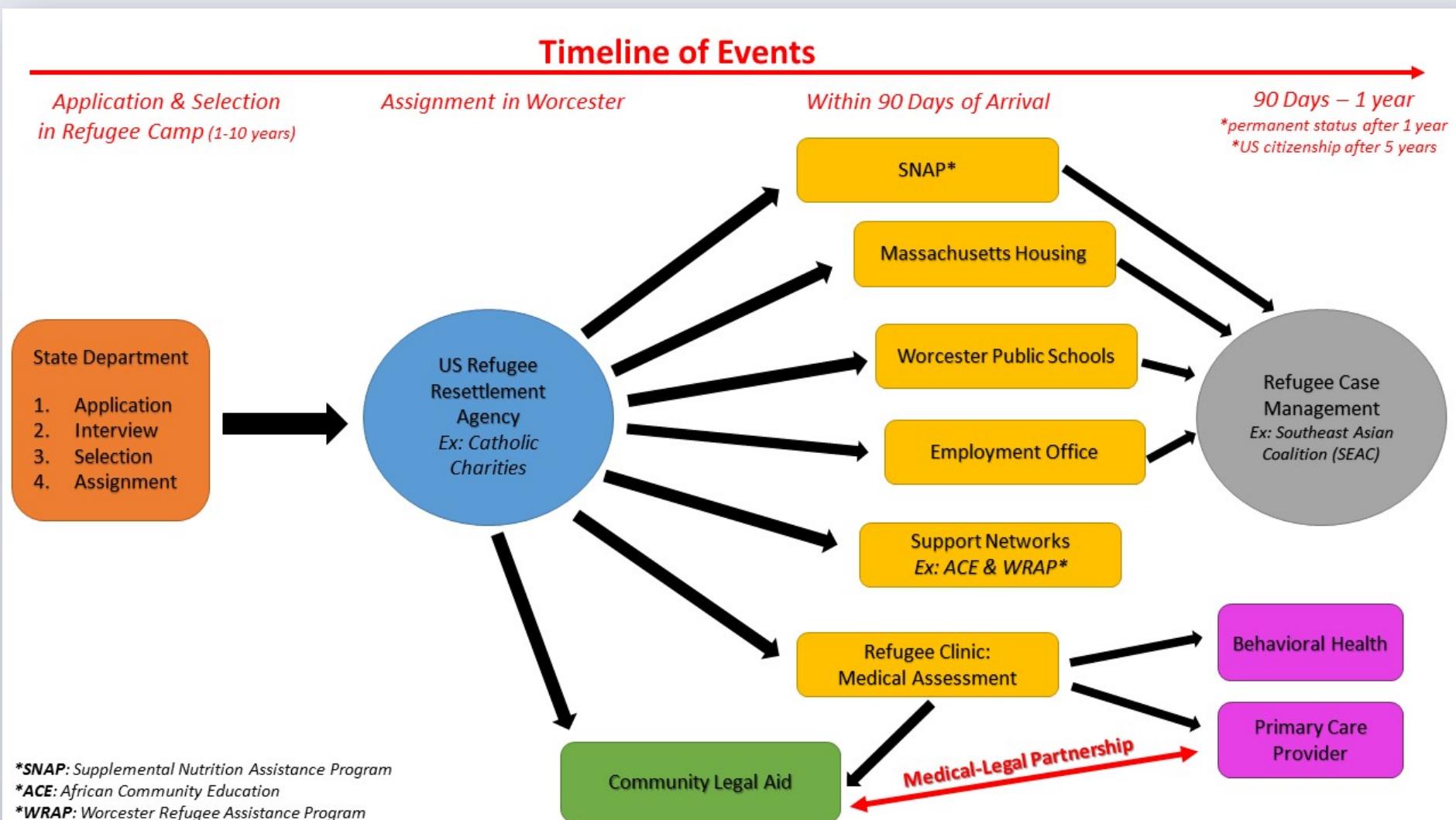
Manifestations and Implications



- Refugee populations face health inequities due to multiple contributing factors that begin on arrival to America: lack of funding, poor resource allocation such as housing and health care, language, religious and cultural barriers, and racism result in poor health outcomes.
  - This framework is also applied to immigrant and low income populations
- Worcester is resource rich with social services and community health centers but accessibility, awareness and appropriate members of the care team continue to result in under utilization of services.

## Inter-Professional Network Description

Refugee Resettlement Timeline & Supporting Services



### ANALYSIS

- The refugee resettlement timeline is a lengthy and complicated process.
- Many organizations work together to physically and culturally orient refugees into their new home.
- Each group is vital & of equal importance to the assimilation of refugees into America.
- Community Legal Aid (CLA) and Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) are the newest partners of refugee resettlement and thus need the most relationship development.

### ACTION PLAN

1. Awareness: become aware of common refugee related problems and the services offered from other resettlement support groups.
2. Leadership: identify champions to help foster inter-professional relationships.
3. Communication: encourage free, open, and frequent communication between disciplines.
4. Training: teach an integrated model of refugee resettlement; create a cohesive team.

## Service Project Summary

Goals:

- Learn about the legal issues affecting the Worcester refugee population.
- Learn about how health care providers can screen for health-harming legal problems and refer them to the correct legal channels.
- Educate the community about Medical-Legal Partnership and integrate it into the Worcester Free Clinics.

Progress:

- Created a brochure that guides the process of applying for MassHealth and the role MLP can play in assisting those who have been denied.
- Plan to educate clinic coordinators and volunteers at the Worcester Free Clinic about referring to Community Legal Aid.
- Established connections at a Massachusetts conference for Medical Legal Partners and spoke with health care providers and curriculum developers about how to incorporate MLP into health care provider curriculum.

Outcomes:

- Piloted the brochure with positive response.

## Lessons Learned and Next Steps

- The absolute need to develop care teams that include legal professionals as well as social workers, community health workers, and patient navigators.
- The overwhelming need for local and state government to address issues surrounding housing and other social determinants of health
- Complexity of the resettlement process and need for additional funding to fill gaps in care
- Increase awareness and integration of MLP into medical services and education

## MLP Clerkship Experiences

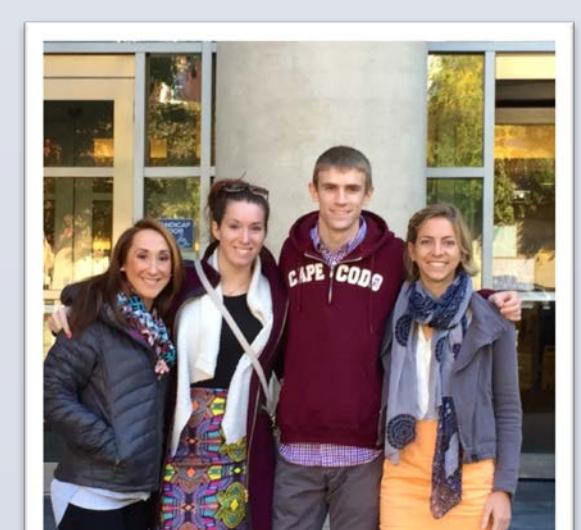
Photos highlighting some of our experiences throughout the 2 week Clerkship



Senior Health & Safety Fair



Edward M. Kennedy CHC\*  
\*Community Health Center



Housing Court

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deepest thanks and gratitude to the many people who introduced us to the complex and fascinating world of Medical-Legal Partnership.

- PHC-MLP Team Leader: Heather Lyn Haley, PhD
- Community Legal Aid: Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham, JD
- Central West Justice Center: Medha Makhlof, JD and Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies, JD
- Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center: Donna Raymond, NP and Meredith Walsh, NP
- Southeast Asian Coalition & Worcester Refugee Assistance Program (WRAP)
- Catholic Charities: Diane Lambert

## References

Baker, Elizabeth A., Metzler, Marilyn, et al. Promoting Health Equity: A resource to help communities address social determinants of health. US Department of Public Health, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2008. Retrieved from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/SDOH-workbook.pdf>