

# AREA OF EMPHASIS SCHOLARS

# immigrants and refugees

SPRING  
2023

## 2022-2023 Year in Review

Welcome to the 2022-2023 AEIR newsletter! It was an honor to be the faculty coordinator for this incredible group of AEIR Scholars. The words that come to mind to describe this group are "courageous leaders." They led efforts in outreach as well as in co-developing a research study to understand the experiences of Immigrant, Refugee, and BIPOC students in the MSW program. In May, Deqa Yusuf, Henry Ngo, and Julie Joloka courageously presented findings and recommendations from this study to all MSW faculty. I'm also especially grateful to June Way and Rita Rai for their leadership on the newsletter this year.

We celebrated five graduating scholars by sharing dinner, and we also attended the George Floyd Memorial Candlelight Vigil together.

We look forward to welcoming seven incoming scholars in the fall.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and learning about the AEIR program and it's scholars, their passions, and goals. We look forward to continuing to build on this work in the coming year.



Dr. Tonya Horn  
AEIR Faculty Coordinator

"The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources—because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples."  
- President Lyndon B. Johnson



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# Letter from the Editors



Dear Readers,

It is our absolute pleasure to present the 2022-23 Area of Emphasis in Immigrants and Refugees (AEIR) newsletter. This school year brought many changes consisting of classes taking place in-person with no face masks mandated, and more in-person engagements on the campus and border community due to COVID starting to abate. This newsletter aims to highlight the amazing work of AEIR scholars and their contributions to our communities (see Julie, Henry, and Ted's reflections).

We open our newsletter with a beautiful reflection of a poem by Jessie. Our newest faculty, Bao Moua, provides great insights into integrating important cultural aspects when working with immigrant and refugee populations. Our editors and scholars also make significant contributions to the newsletter. June shares a personal poem (p. 6) about her experiences as a refugee and Rita provides a list of local community resources for immigrants and refugee populations (p. 7) as we know culturally appropriate resources for our targeted population can be limited.

This year, AEIR scholars Dequa, Henry, and Julie, with the support of professors Dr. Tonya Horn, Bao Moua, and Alicia Powers developed a study to gain insights into immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC-identified students' experience in the MSW program at St. Thomas.

The last page of this newsletter celebrates our 2023 graduating scholars, honoring their dedication and commitment to completing this academic journey, and we wish each of them the best in their future endeavors. Lastly, we want to express our genuine gratitude to Traudt family for their generous contributions and support of Traudt Family Scholars throughout their MSW program journey.

Rita Rai and June Way  
**June 2023**



## Beautiful Reflection of Warsan Shire's "Home"

*Jessie Levine*

The most effective way to grasp the diversity of the refugee experience is from the voices of those who have made that journey. Warsan Shire is one such voice. She was born in Nairobi to Somali parents and eventually made her way to London, where she grew up to become a writer and poet. Her voice is uniquely hers, but her popularity suggests many empathize with her story. She has published two chapbooks ("Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth," and "My Blue Body") and, more recently, a full-length book of poetry ("Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head"). She received the inaugural Brunel International African Poetry Prize in 2013. Also in 2013, she served as the first Young Poet Laureate of London. She is a member of the Royal Society of Literature and is included in the Penguin Modern Poets series. In collaboration with Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, she wrote the poetry for the Disney film *Black is King* and the album *Lemonade*, which won a Peabody Award. Shire also wrote the short film *Brave Girl Rising*, which tells the stories of Somali girls in Africa's largest refugee camp.



Here is an excerpt that begins Warsan Shire's poem entitled Home:

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well. The boy you went to school with, who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory, is holding a gun bigger than his body. You only leave home when home won't let you stay.



## Reflections from Field Placement

*Julie Joloka*

I am completing my Field Foundation internship at ISD 279 at one of their middle schools called Northview Middle School in Brooklyn Park. Due to the fact that I attended Northview Middle School during my 7th through 9th grade years, I found it particularly meaningful to complete my Field Foundation internship there. Having attended ISD 279 from 4th grade through high school, I am familiar with the district. In my view, it is imperative to give back to the community in which one resides. As part of my journey, Northview played an instrumental role in shaping me. The opportunity to work as a social work intern at my former junior high school presented itself to me. The services I provide to students will be in conjunction with those provided by my field instructor. The Northview community includes a significant number of refugees and immigrants. My experience as an immigrant and refugee living in America allows me to connect with students through their language, culture, and food. Furthermore, I have the opportunity to share my experience with them. I am an immigrant who once struggled through school and life in America and still continues to do so today.



# Interview with Bao Moua

*Rita Rai and June Way*

**Q: Can you share your personal or professional experience working with immigrants in refugee communities, and what drew you to working with this specific population?**



A: When I started in this field, I didn't go into social work right away. I graduated with an undergrad in family social sciences. So, at the start of my career, I was hired to work specifically with the Hmong community. I started out at Big Brothers Big Sisters, and they were really looking for someone who was from the Hmong community to support Hmong students in the Saint Paul Public schools. And so that was kind of the start of my introduction, and working with immigrant and refugee families, it opened my eyes to think about my own experience as well. I was born here in the US. But my parents were immigrants and refugees, so I have that knowledge, and have seen the struggles my family and extended family and the (Hmong) community have gone through. It motivated me to want to continue to work with others who may have a similar experience and who may need that support. So many of the jobs that I held, it's really working directly with immigrant and refugee communities. After the job at Big Brothers, Big Sisters, I transitioned to work at Children's Hospital in their psychological services department, where I served as a cultural liaison, also working directly with Hmong families or Southeast Asian clients who were coming to that program. Then I got introduced to Wilder right afterwards, and it was because I completed my internship there and then I got hired on. They had a specific program serving the Southeast Asian community, and that kind of just drew me to want to do this work. It helped solidify what kind of career path I wanted to continue in.

**Q: How have you had to adapt your practice to meet the needs of refugee and immigrant communities?**

A: One way to adapt is meeting with the clients where they are at by going to the places that they trust, whether it's at home, the school, churches, or at agencies that they trust already. Another way is using culturally familiar activities to support healing for them. In the Center for Social Healing at Wilder, we don't do a lot of the traditional talk therapy. We engage them in activities such as gardening, cooking, sharing meals together, celebrating holidays that are familiar to those ethnic groups versus celebrating the traditional Western holidays. Even engaging them in sewing and doing art, because that's familiar to that cultural group, and so that supported healing for them and it wasn't the traditional Western methods way of engaging clients. Even taking them out to be in nature helps them remember their homeland and that was kind of a comfort for them. In addition, it was a healing process for them. Many individuals, when they come to the US, they experience isolation because they don't have the opportunities to go out and engage in those activities because there's lots of barriers. We also include family as part of our services even with adult clients, because we know that many especially in the Southeast Asian community, they value interdependence versus independence. Using culturally relevant terminology is another way of adapting services. I always go back to when I used to teach this parenting group called the Incredible Years and the model uses a pyramid to describe the core components of that model. A pyramid is not very familiar to Southeast Asian communities, and so instead of using that I modified it to use the structure of a house, or using harvesting or planting metaphors to support understanding of terminology or core concepts of treatment models for clients. Another example is not requiring a diagnostic assessment at the very first appointment when clients come in. We are throwing all these questions or interviewing them right away and that may not be the best way to engage individuals. When we think about immigrants/refugees, they've gone through a similar process, like the interview for coming to the US. It could be very retraumatizing for many of our clients, and so instead can we engage them by just getting to know them and understanding what support they need first versus asking them to tell me about this, tell me about your whole life. So, these are examples of different ways to engage or adapt our services for this population.



**Q: In your opinion, what kind of resources or training are available, and what is lacking, for service providers who are working with immigrant or refugee communities?**

A: Immediately what comes to mind are the agencies and organizations that are doing a lot of work with immigrant refugee communities, like Minnesota Council of Churches, Lutheran Social Services, the Karen Organization of Minnesota, Hmong American partnership, and Wilder Foundation. There might already be a specific agency or organization developed for that specific ethnic group or cultural community, so reaching out to those agencies to learn more about how they are serving the immigrant and refugee communities and knowing more about those resources. There isn't that much training available. I was really surprised and grateful to hear that St. Thomas offers an area of emphasis in immigrant and refugee work; not all universities or programs offer that. What I typically see is that there's a diversity course that is required for all students to enroll in and immigrants and refugees work might be like a topic for a specific class session. So that's kind of the extent of it when we think about colleges and programs and what they offer to students. Sometimes we have reached out to specific agencies who have been doing a lot of work with immigrant and refugee populations and ask if they can do a training. If you're working for an agency and you see a gap in terms of knowledge for you or your colleagues, you could request your leadership to get more training to support your work with this population. So, there is a need for more training for providers to continue to do this work.

**Q: Can you talk about things that facilitate access to services for people with refugee backgrounds specifically?**

A: I think again connecting with agencies that provide resources, so learning more about what resources are available for the immigrant refugee population. I really believe in cultural brokers, and that could be a resource. I know when I was at Wilder, I was really advocating toward, could we fund more culture brokers? Could the State give us money to hire more culture brokers to support certain cultural groups or immigrant/refugee populations? Because cultural brokers, they are from the community, they know the culture, and they can also help individuals access these resources and be that middle ground person in case there might be some barriers or misunderstanding that the provider and the client may have. Cultural brokers really help support access for our clients who need it to support them to excel or as they come to the US to support them adapting to the new country. Another thing is recruiting more providers from those cultural communities. We have a shortage of providers, but we need individuals who reflect the communities because they have the knowledge to serve these communities in a culturally responsive way. Also, creating more resources that could be readily available to clients, especially when serving immigrants' and refugees' needs.

**Q: What do you find is the most meaningful about your work with immigrant and refugee communities?**

A: I think the one thing that always motivates me is hearing from these individuals indicating that they have hope for their future or even just witnessing their resilience. As they make a life for themselves here in the US and seeing that they are excelling, and they can create a sense of safety for themselves and their families. I think that's what motivates me and creates meaning for me as I do this work. I often go back to my parents' own experience. It's because of their hard work and their resilience, and I'm the product of the work that they did. They supported me and my siblings, because we were born here in the US and didn't experience the direct immigrant refugee experience. But because our parents did all that work, and they excelled, as children we are excelling even further than them, so it's a ripple effect. So, when I work with the individual, I don't think that I'm just helping that individual, I'm helping that individual to support their families, and then even their communities that they're in and are a part of.

# Dear my refugee girl

*June Way*



Dear my refugee girl,

I hear you. I see you. I've lived through your experiences.

Your world has been locked in a box, limited from unlimited possibilities.

Your wings are restricted, like a caged bird as you've been conditioned to operate only in that confined space, having to fear the unknown, instability, and possible danger.

Your fate has already been determined, by the rules of the oppressor, and questionable religious ideology.

Your eyes are covered by a thick black cloth so that all you can see and ever know is how to live a simple refugee girl's life.

Your thoughts are suppressed and you learn not to question authority and unethical acts conducted by corrupt leaders.

Your root has been ripped apart after years of killing, segregation, and inhumane treatment that was forced upon your Karen people.

Your dreams are all you have that you could hold on tightly without knowing whether they could ever become a reality and you know that your chances are pretty slim.

But dear my refugee girl, can you feel the innate wisdom in you,  
Can you feel the power within you, the shining light inside of you that is waiting and waiting to guide you, to heal your soul and to empower the hell out of you.

So please believe in you, believe in the countless souls you will inspire one day.

Use your fighting spirit to fight for you because to me, you matter  
Your courage matters to me, to grow and to thrive in a world that is designed to kill the very dimming light I have, a world where all odds are against me, and a world where all that I ever need is you.

Dear my refugee girl.

# Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Community Resources

Rita Rai

## **African Immigrants Community Services**

1433 E Franklin Ave #13b, Minneapolis, MN 55404  
(612) 871-9481

## **Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (Wilder Center for Social Healing)**

451 Lexington Parkway North, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2000

## **Arrive Ministries**

1515 East 66th St., Richfield, MN 55423  
612-798-4332

## **Bhutanese community of MN**

2499 Rice St Suite 150, Roseville MN 55113  
(651) 202-3715

## **CAPI USA**

5930 Brooklyn Blvd, Minneapolis, MN 55429  
(612) 721-0122

## **CLUES Minnesota**

777 E Lake St, Minneapolis, MN 55407  
(612) 746-3500

## **Hmong American Partnership University Office**

394 University Ave. W, 2nd Floor, Saint Paul, MN 55103  
651-495-9160

## **Karen Organization-Minnesota**

2353 Rice St #240, Roseville, MN 55113  
651-788-7593

## **International Institute of Minnesota**

1694 Como Ave, St Paul, MN 55108  
651-647-0191

## **LSS Refugee Services**

2400 Park Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55404  
612.879.5258

## **Minnesota Council of Churches**

122 Franklin Avenue West, Suite 100, Minneapolis, MN 55404  
612-870-3600

## **SEWA-AIFW**

6645 James Ave N, Brooklyn Center, MN 55430  
(763)205-9873

## **Somali Community Resettlement Services**

Minneapolis, 612-353-6380



## Outreach to Meet the Needs of Karen Refugees

Henry Ngo



My time on the outreach committee focused on encouraging potential applicants from the Karen Organization of Minnesota to apply for the AEIR program and pursue an MSW degree. Drawing from my professional experiences at the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) and the Wilder Foundation, I observed a lack of Karen providers and growing complex needs in the Karen community. The purpose of my outreach effort to the Karen Organization of Minnesota was to persuade Karen professionals to pursue the MSW program. I believe even a single applicant becoming a Karen clinical social worker could have profound benefits for the Karen community.

As I practice therapy at Wilder's outpatient clinic with Karen clients, I am aware of my innate limitations as a provider from a different culture even with the guidance of Karen cultural brokers. In working with refugee clients, lived experience can be important in establishing strong therapeutic relationships and minimizing power imbalances. As I was born in the United States, it is difficult for me to conceptualize the slog of years spent in refugee camps for Karen clients and the toll that would take on a person's mental health. Early on in my clinical practicum, I recognized the need for Karen practitioners and how such a person would be able to provide services beyond my cultural scope. A Karen practitioner could speak the language of lived experience, which would be invaluable for Karen clients seeking therapy.

In observing the need for a Karen practitioner at Wilder and drawing from my connections to the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM), I decided to focus my outreach to KOM. These outreach efforts were successful in translating interest in St. Thomas' MSW program to applications. I provided my contact information to interested applicants and responded to questions regarding the MSW program to help these applicants make an informed decision. I am hopeful that as the field of social work develops, more refugee practitioners will be able to serve their communities and in doing so diversify and enhance the profession.



## Reflection

Ted Tiffany



During my foundational MSW internship as a case manager, I was struggling to find immigration lawyers who had the capacity to take on new pro bono cases. The political climate of late 2020 meant uncertainty and fear for many immigrants in the Twin Cities, and COVID-19 pushed many aspects of society to remote work, including immigration court, creating a massive backlog. As I voiced my concern and frustration about not being able to find representation for my clients, my supervisor told me about the JD/MSW dual degree program. If there aren't enough available immigration lawyers, why don't I become one?

In January of 2023, I watched two clients of the University of St. Thomas Interprofessional Center of Counseling and Legal Services (IPC) take their oath of allegiance, completing their long journey to becoming citizens of the United States. This mother and son had worked with the IPC for over 10 years, with dozens of psychology, social work, and law students helping along the way. As a certified law student practitioner at the IPC's Immigration Law Practice Group, I played a very small part in their stories, which included representing the mom during her final interview with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. It brought me a lot of joy to see her and her son that day.

Being a dual degree student has been full of challenges. The worlds of law and social work are quite different from one another, and yet they overlap in clientele, demand, and ability to greatly impact someone's life. Present a client's narrative to a group of social workers, and they will give you a list of questions and recommendations quite different from that of a group of lawyers. I have learned a lot over the last 2.5 years, but I am still learning how to live and learn with a foot in each world.

Before coming to St. Thomas, I was a youth worker for over five years. My connection and passion for working with immigrant teenagers is what made me want to become a social worker, which in turn led to my interest in immigration law. I am often conflicted about which role I am best suited for, which one I can utilize to make the most difference in people's lives. I don't know where I'll end up or what I'll be doing, but I trust that my interests and passion will bring me to the right place.

# Interview with the Traudt Family

Rita Rai and June Way

## Q: What is the Traudt Family Scholarship and its mission?

A: The scholarship was established in 2020 with the goal of responding to the need for culturally relevant mental health services in our communities. People who have immigrated to the United States themselves typically have a deeper understanding of the social and cultural differences and sometimes traumatic stories behind the refugee experience. The Traudt Family Scholarship provides up to \$5,000 per student recipient per year to increase the number of social workers serving immigrant and refugee populations. Priority is given to first- and second-generation immigrant students in an effort to align those who have enhanced understanding and personal experience with vulnerable others in their population group.

## Q: Can you share what inspired you to establish the Traudt Family Scholarship?

A: Our interest in this space has grown from our relationship. We became friends with a first-generation immigrant who was seeking asylum in the United States. Walking alongside someone dealing firsthand with the social, psychological, and economic challenges of being a refugee and asylum seeker was so eye-opening for us. We became very close to her and her family and, through that relationship, became familiar with the resources at the University of St. Thomas and the Master of Social Work program. Early in 2020, we started talking with leaders in the AEIR program about how we might help, and they put together a proposal that we agreed to for the scholarship details.

## Q: What are some of your hopes and dreams for the Traudt Family scholars?

A: We know that one singular effort isn't going to change the world, but valuable changes can be made one person at a time. A scholarship can help one person, and with education and resources that person can impact many more people. Our desire for every scholarship recipient is that they take their education, professional skills, and their passion and use it to the benefit of others.



*Congratulations and best wishes to these  
2023 AEIR graduates!*



Deqa Yusuf  
Henry Nyo  
Jessie Levine  
June Way  
Rita Rai



## Bonus Content

### *Highlights from the 2022 Edition of the AEIR Newsletter*

Due to unforeseen circumstances, we were unable to publish the 2022 edition of the AEIR newsletter. To honor the hard work of the students who wrote articles for that newsletter, their pieces have been included here as bonus content. Enjoy!

## The Importance of Outreach to the Karen Community

*Henry Ngo*

This semester, I had the opportunity to present on the importance of a master's in clinical social work to the Karen Organization of Minnesota. Karen people are refugees from Burma, who have been forced from their country by a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing. The Karen community in the Twin Cities is growing and has specific cultural needs reflecting the long years of war and confinement in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. Outreach to the Karen Organization serves as a pipeline for future Karen practitioners.



Effective practice is grounded in the lived experience of the Karen community. There are barriers to Karen people receiving services. The most coercive barrier is language, in which services are so complex and inaccessible that even native English speakers have challenges navigating these systems. The complexity of refugee trauma, which is colored by culturally specific meaning making and resilience, is rarely captured by western diagnoses. The limits of outside practitioners and agencies in serving the Karen community are apparent. There is demand for Karen practitioners ranging from psychotherapists to clinical social workers to best meet the culturally specific needs of the Karen community.

As a community health worker at the Karen organization, I have continually raised awareness of the value of a master's in social work. Social justice is enabling refugee communities to raise themselves by encouraging younger generations to be service professionals. Karen refugees who embark on career paths as service professionals can move the profession of social work forward by inspiring members to embark on the same journey. Positive community change begins with those who are part of that community.

## Reflection on My Internship

*Lizeth Andrade-Vital*

This year I interned at Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES). The primary community they serve is the Latin American community. CLUES is located in Saint Paul within the Consulate of Mexico on 797 E 7th St, St Paul, MN 55106. Due to the pandemic, the internship started online. It has only been recently that CLUES have allowed in-person appointments for those who qualify; telehealth is still the primary way to receive therapeutic services due to the pandemic. CLUES has also been managing a food drive for families in need.



Interning at CLUES, I have met extraordinary people with rich experience. During my time at the internship, I have been able to shadow the Chemical Health therapy group sessions and learn about CTSS services. I have been fortunate to be supported by the staff at CLUES in my learning journey. When I went into CLUES I did not know how to do a diagnosis assessment (DA) properly, much less at a treatment plan. A DA at the beginning would take me a week to complete now takes me 2 hours to do. A treatment plan that took me a week to do now takes me 1 hour to complete, due to the meticulous support the staff has provided.

While I have worked with clients, I have collaborated with other staff in and outside the agency such as CTSS workers, mental health case managers, families, and other providers. Through CLUES, I have been able to practice the theories I learned in Methods class with the clients I currently have. I have been able to form my internship in a way that helps me learn how to better work with my clients. Such as learning more about eating disorders, body image positivity, ADHD, and so on. I have had the opportunity to be shadowed in sessions and have been given rich feedback that has helped me become a better clinician. As a result of my training, I have become more trauma-informed, learned more about risk assessments, and tailored the services given through a cultural lens. Due to the staff at CLUES patience and kindness, I was able to learn these skills. I have so much to learn, and I am grateful for CLUES staff guidance.

# Open the Door to the World of Graphic Novels

*Jessica Levine*



I regret to say, I did not grow up reading graphic novels. I was introduced to their magic more recently when my kids were learning to read. They gravitated to comics because the stories and illustrations were more interesting than the “Jane and Dick” type early reader books. It opened a world for all of us.

We are still hooked. We have all gobbled up countless graphic novels now. My kids are older and graphic novels have been a great way for them to become acquainted with more emotionally and socially difficult topics. In recent years we have encountered books that reflect on the refugee experience.

Here are some examples:

*Persepolis* is a memoir both written and illustrated by Marjane Satrapi. She tells her story in two parts. The first as a child growing up in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution until political unrest and violence forced her parents to send Marjane away. The second part is about her tumultuous resettlement and high school years in Vienna.

In *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, the author and illustrator is telling his father’s story as a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. We learn about his experience caught in the war and parts of his resettlement as a refugee in the United States. This book is timely since it recently made the news after being banned by some school boards and also because the remaining survivors of the Holocaust will soon no longer be here to tell their stories firsthand.

*Illegal* by Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin is a fictional story of a boy named Ebo based on real stories of migration through the Sahara Desert. Giovanni Riganois’s illustrations are beautiful and take the reader from Ghana across the desert and eventually across the sea. The pictures pull the reader into a heroic and harrowing story of migration, loss, and hope.

*When Stars are Scattered* is the story of Omar Mohamed (illustrated by Victoria Jamison and Iman Geddy) who spent his childhood at Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. It highlights how challenging obtaining an education in a refugee camp can be. Omar now lives in Pennsylvania and founded Refugee Strong, a project that empowers students living in refugee camps.

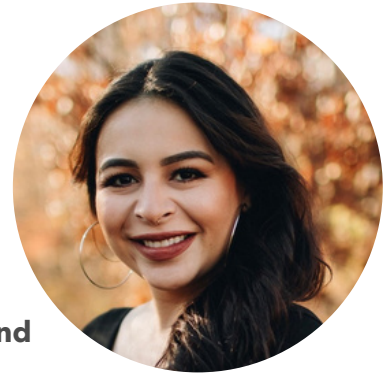
Graphic novels are not just for kids. And caregivers should consider the individual child or teen before making a recommendation. These stories are not easy to take in. They reflect the contradictions of humanity - the coldness and warmth, the pain and resilience. They can also open the door for thoughtful conversations.



# Interview with Marissa Jensen

*Cassie Rollins and Kenzie Libbesmeier*

It's our pleasure to introduce you to Marissa Jensen, who teaches the field seminar course for AEIR students, as well as GRSW 628, Clinical Practice with Immigrants and Refugees.



## **Q: Could you share a little about your personal and/or work background with immigrant and refugee communities?**

A: I am first generation immigrant; my father is a refugee from Laos and migrated to the U.S. because of the Vietnam War. At a young age, I needed to help my father in working through various barriers to resources as the access points were only in English which he was and is still learning. These access points, many of which have not changed over the past 3 decades, placed high value on my father's legal status with little regard to his story. This experience prompted me to continue to advocate for folks who had similar backgrounds and work within these systems to shift barriers experienced. I have worked at various metro agencies that serve immigrant and refugee populations, in case management for folks experiencing substance use, in clinical settings, and in group therapy specific to those who use abusive behaviors and engage in the Intergeneration Cycle of Violence. I have also engaged in community work while volunteering at C.L.U.E.S.

## **Q: What do you find the most meaningful about your work with immigrant and refugee communities?**

A: What motivates me and what gives meaning to this work is my connection to my father and his immigration story. I also believe that through discussions and experiences as well as exposure to working closely with this population, we can begin to shift the narrative and challenge unhelpful or unsafe rhetoric that may appear within the public. They are often untrue of the immigrant and refugee population, which in many regards can be considered a vulnerable one.

## **Q: This is your first year teaching the AEIR course. What do you hope students gain from the course?**

A: And I'm loving it! I hope that students gain a perspective that challenges the current Western model in which this population is expected to receive treatment. I hope they develop skills to identify the shortcomings of these systems and challenge them. Lastly, I hope they are encouraged to engage in the community aspect of working with diverse populations as a way to serve them better and continue to work on their cultural humility.

## **Q: How has the course shifted over time, and why?**

A: The course was previously very literature heavy with some incorporation of speakers. While literature is important, I wanted to include more application of these skills and develop these perspectives mentioned above in a more hands on and engaging way. I wanted to make sure that I could share my experience with students and also allow them to share their experiences with the class, whether they have personal connections to the populations or their professional experience thus far. I hope to teach through conversation, exposure to clinicians who hold immigrant and refugee backgrounds sharing who are currently working with the population, and engagement in hands on learning such as role plays and small group work.

# A Critical Relationship: Healthcare & Immigration Status

*William H. Holmes*

Throughout the academic year I have had the incredible opportunity of serving in a practicum placement with the James H. Binger Center for New Americans, which is the immigration law clinic within the University of Minnesota Law School. This has provided me with a deeper understanding of how social workers and attorneys can work together for the common good of clients. It has also allowed me to comprehend U.S. immigration policy and fluently speak to system dynamics. However, perhaps the most important thing I've learned about is the critical relationship between healthcare and immigration status, and what access means to both.



One of the things that immigration attorneys strive to demonstrate to the courts is that their client will be irreparably harmed if the government moves forward with deportation. For clients who live with mental health disorders, this can be tantamount to torture depending upon the conditions of their country of origin. Indeed, the United Nations Conventions Against Torture can be used to argue that someone should not be deported for just this reason. The key dilemma though is often that the client is ineligible for health insurance and so access to diagnostic evidence to make such a case can be difficult to obtain, particularly via overburdened channels.

Working diligently to help clients access mental health resources can prove critical to their immigration cases and result in their ability to remain in the U.S. During my time in the practicum this has included accessing care for a client's wellbeing, collaborating with attorneys to utilize this information to support their case, and myself drafting an affidavit to support an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. As clients become lawfully present, this opens up opportunities for increased access to healthcare, employment authorization, as well as a myriad of other public and private resources. For many clients, deportation is a matter of life or death. Our work is to not only ensure they survive, but thrive.



*Congratulations and best wishes to these  
2022 AEIR graduates!*



Qamar Abdi  
Rachel Amerman  
Lizeth Andrade-Vital  
William Holmes  
Kenzie Libbesmeier  
Seynab Miyer  
Cassandra Rollins  
Luis Solis-Reyes