



REFUGEE HEALTH PROMOTION

SCHOOL YEAR TRANSITIONS IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Lydia Laythe, MSW

Trauma & Addiction Program Coordinator | USCRI Erie

llaythe@uscmail.org | 814-452-3935

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Improve *language access* for refugee families regarding school-related material
- Improve refugee student and family engagement in new *online learning* platforms

COVID-19 WIDENED UNDERLYING GAPS

- Linguistic barriers that were commonly overcome through interpreters, multilingual students, or utilizing facial expression, body language, and other nonverbal cues were heightened by social distancing, quarantine, and “no contact” communication.
- School district updates were sent to families in writing, in English. Oftentimes the most linguistic accessibility given was a small print at the end of a document that instructed families to call a phone number for an interpreter.
- Teachers were trying to manage so many different types of households that many non-English speaking homes were left out from discussions.

COVID-19 WIDENED UNDERLYING GAPS

- Cultural barriers were widened as teachers began to see (and judge) how households operated from the limited view of their student's video feed.
 - Parents and caregivers were “reprimanded” for the way they supervised their children while “in school.”
 - Being “too lenient” or “inattentive” or being “too harsh/strict”
 - School District maintained expectations for attendance despite the various changing needs/realities for families
 - Families already navigating many barriers (linguistic, cultural, employment, transportation, housing, etc.) were now deemed “truant” and given another issue to add to their plate.



WHILE CHANGING THE SYSTEM WOULD BE THE BEST OPTION

WE KNEW OUR SOLUTION HAD TO ADDRESS
THE GAPS BUT WORK WITH THE SYSTEMS
(AND RESOURCES) ALREADY AT WORK.



**SO OUR PROJECT PROPOSED TO
TAKE A SYSTEM THAT WASN'T
CREATED FOR OUR FAMILIES – AND
WASN'T WORKING FOR OUR FAMILIES**

**AND MAKE OURSELVES THE TRAUMA-INFORMED
& CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE BRIDGE BETWEEN THE
SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND OUR FAMILIES**



**BUT FIRST WE HAD TO
UNDERSTAND TRAUMA**

SOURCES OF TRAUMA

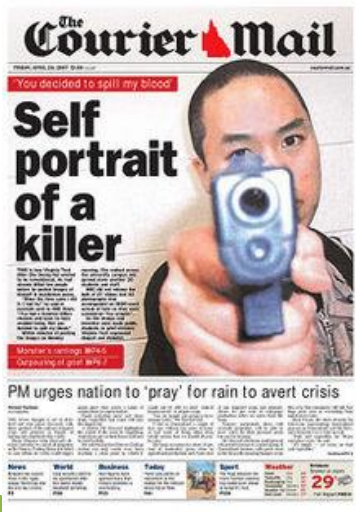
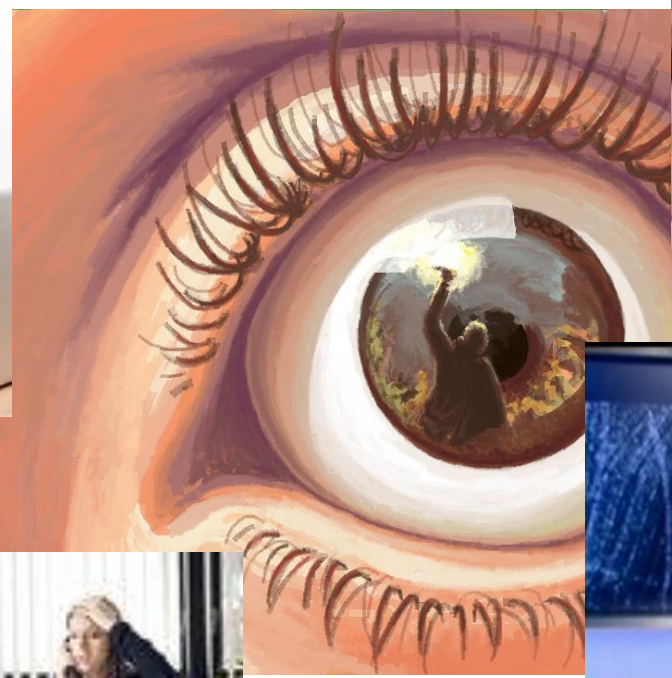
- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Impaired caregiver
- Caregiver struggling with mental illness
- Caregiver struggling with addiction
- Caregiver or family member incarcerated
- Witnessing drug use
- Witnessing suicide
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Witnessing gang/community violence
- Natural disaster



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

SOURCES OF TRAUMA

- Witnessing trauma
- Hearing about trauma
- Seeing trauma on news/social media



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under

SOURCES OF TRAUMA

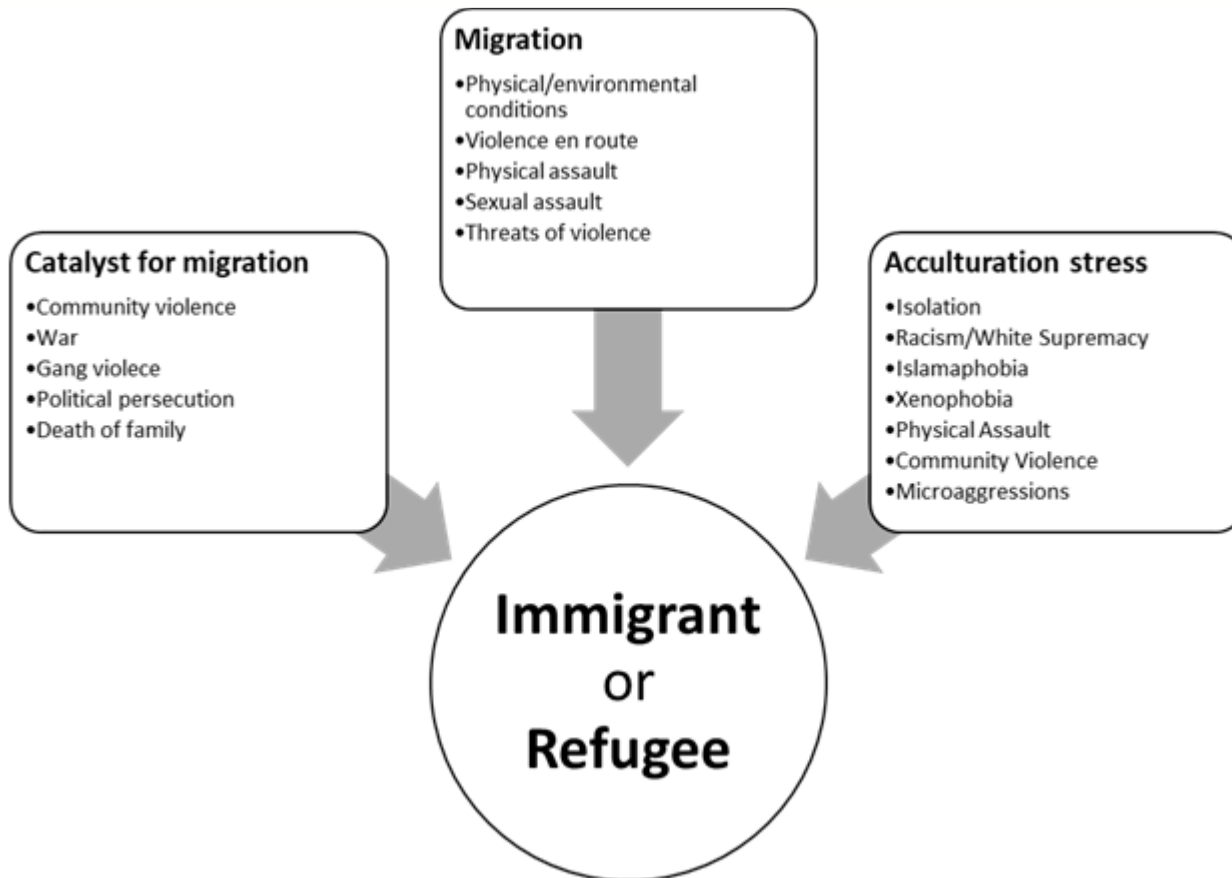
- Microaggressions
- Racism, sexism, islamophobia, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism
- Seeing police cars/officers with their lights on in your neighborhood multiple times a day
- Seeing your friends get restrained by school safety officers
- Being isolated everyday



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

SOURCES OF TRAUMA





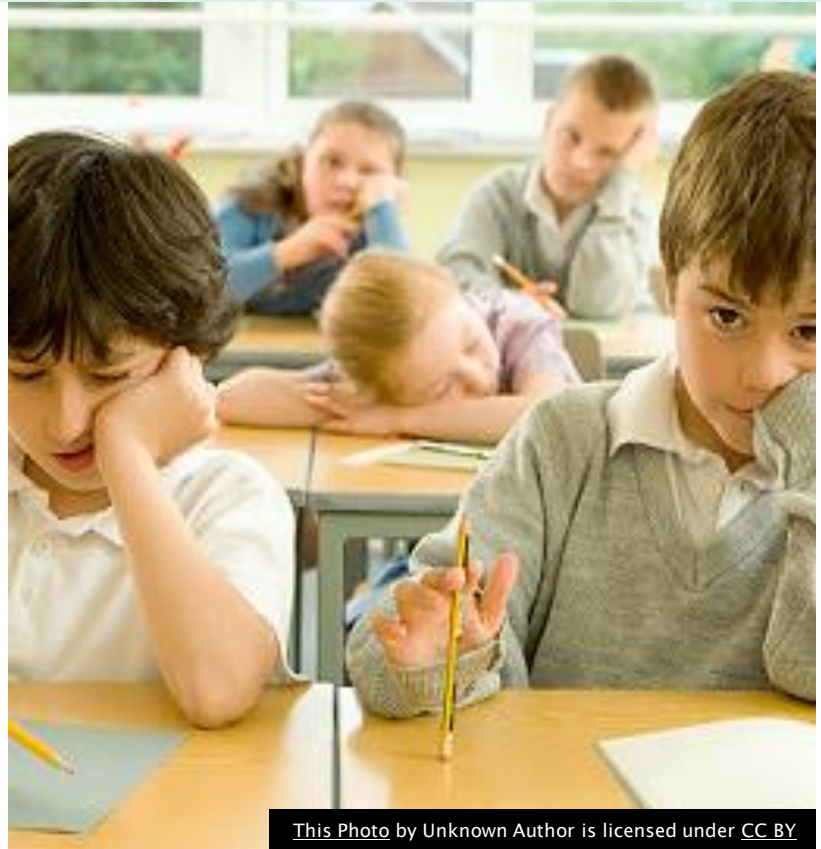
**THEN WE HAD TO
UNDERSTAND HOW
THAT WAS IMPACTING
OUR CLIENTS'
RELATIONSHIP WITH
SCHOOLS & OTHER
ORGANIZATIONS**

IN THE CLASSROOM...

What does being “triggered” look like?

- Acting out
- Fighting
- Arguing
- Shutting down
- Sleeping
- Not participating
- Crying
- Avoiding peers
- Needing a lot of attention
- Being “clingy” to teacher or peer

**Recall:
Fight – Flight – Freeze**



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

- Improve *language access* = empowering families to have their voices heard.
- Improve *online learning* = helping families find stability and support.



THANK YOU!

Lydia Laythe, MSW

Trauma & Addiction Program Coordinator | USCRI Erie

llaythe@uscmail.org | 814-452-3935