

# REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN FARGO

A REPORT FROM THE FARGO HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

APRIL 13, 2017





**“On average, a first generation immigrant is cost positive in North Dakota by approximately \$3,250 per individual.”**

*— The National Academies of Sciences*



# PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide the City of Fargo a course of action to communicate human relations issues to individuals and groups in Fargo. The Fargo Human Relations Commission recognizes responsible city governance includes a thorough understanding of any practices that affect its citizens and appreciates the opportunity to be a part of making the City of Fargo a welcoming community for all. We recognize and thank the dozens of people and organizations who shared knowledge and understanding of refugee resettlement in Fargo.

At the City Commission meeting on October 10, 2016 Commissioner John Strand made the motion below, Commissioner Dave Piepkorn seconded. All agreed and the motion was declared carried.

“That the topic of Refugee Resettlement in general, and including subcategories such as finances, costs, accountability, crime understanding and other details as discussed, be referred to the Fargo Human Relations Commission with some analysis and ongoing discussion expected back within a reasonable time.”

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fargo Human Relations Commission (FHRC) would like to thank the Fargo City Commission for the opportunity to study this very important issue. The City of Fargo values human diversity and works to promote equal opportunities in housing, employment, and social climate. The Fargo Human Relations Commission is committed to working in the area of human relations development in the community. The mission of the FHRC is to promote acceptance and respect for diversity and discourage all forms of discrimination (Ordinance 4081, Article 15-02).

# PROCESS

The Fargo Human Relations Commission created a work group, which immediately began meeting to find the data requested by the Fargo City Commission. The working group consisted of FHRC Chair Rachel Hoffman, and fellow Members: Barry Nelson, Abdiwali Sharif-Abdinasir, and Paul Jensen, as well as Fargo Police Officer Vince Kempf, Cultural Liaison Officer and liaison to the Human Relations Commission. The work group included several community volunteers including Anna Marie Stenson, Jake Friedman, and Arlette Preston. Dan Mahli, Willard Yellow Bird, and Kara Gloe, all employees of the City of Fargo, also supported the work group. Information was gathered through interviews and research.

The research intends to involve the total impact of resettlement efforts in Fargo, both what the refugees add to the community and challenges the City of Fargo faces in helping new Americans settle in our community. In an effort to gather the best and most reliable information, the FHRC met with local experts, spanning a wide breadth of areas important to life in Fargo. The experts include:

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Jim Gartin, President, Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation
- ▶ Charley Johnson, President/CEO, Fargo-Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau
- ▶ Craig Whitney, President/CEO, Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce

## EDUCATION

- ▶ Dr. Jeff Schatz, Superintendent, Fargo Public Schools
- ▶ Vincent Williams, English Learners Coordinator, Fargo Public Schools
- ▶ Jennifer Frueh, Adult Learning Center Coordinator, Fargo Public Schools

## EMPLOYERS

- ▶ William Murphy, Environmental Services Manager, Sanford
- ▶ Mike Arntson, Plant Manager, Cardinal IG
- ▶ Mike Prekel, General Manager, Holiday Inn

## HEALTHCARE:

- ▶ Dr. Napoleon Espejo, M.D., Medical Director, Family Healthcare
- ▶ Marlene Espejo, Refugee Health Coordinator, Family Healthcare
- ▶ Dr. John Baird, M.D., Public Health Officer, Fargo Cass Public Health Resettlement agency
- ▶ Shirley Dykshoorn, Vice President for Senior and Humanitarian Services, Lutheran Social Services

## POLICE DEPARTMENT

- ▶ Vince Kempf, 25-year officer, Fargo Police Department and Cultural Liaison Officer

## SOCIAL SERVICES

- ▶ Chip Ammerman, Cass County Social Services Director

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

- ▶ Tim Mahoney, Mayor, Fargo City Commission
- ▶ John Strand, Fargo City Commission
- ▶ Dave Piepkorn, Fargo City Commission
- ▶ Tony Gehrig, Fargo City Commission
- ▶ Tony Grindberg, Fargo City Commission



In addition to this report, the work group developed a communications plan that was approved by the City Commission on January 17, 2017. Per the communications plan, the work group released information to the public on crime statistics, workforce challenges, and New American businesses and entrepreneurs. The press releases are included at the end of this report.

The FHRC is also submitting a video to the Fargo City Commission as part of its presentation. The video features Mike Prekel, General Manager, Holiday Inn; Mike Arntson, Plant Manager, Cardinal IG; Bill Murphy, Environmental Services Manager, Sanford Health; Jim Gartin, President, The Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation; Warheel Khalid; Fowzia Adde, Director, Immigrant Development Center; Ismar Fazlovic; and Ned Halilovic, former refugee and Owner, Rainbow International.

# FINDINGS

The task of studying the costs of the refugee resettlement program is complex. The competing concerns of making sure Fargo remains a welcoming community, ensuring fiscally sound practices, and making sure refugees already in our community are given a reasonable opportunity to succeed, remains a difficult balancing act for a variety reasons, including:

- ▶ Refugees receive legal status per federal law, and as such enjoy certain legal protections. Therefore, many local, state, and federal agencies are prohibited from collecting data based on refugee status. Many agencies visited stated they do not collect such data. Additionally, a number of local agencies and organizations maintain that defining costs or other data specific to a population violates standard ethical practices.
- ▶ Like all permanent residents, once allowed into the country, refugees are free to move about and relocate. Many relocate for employment opportunities or to reunite with family, so data on where refugees live or relocate from is not precise.
- ▶ The timeframe of refugee status is not clearly defined. There is no uniform definition of when a refugee stops being categorized as a refugee.
- ▶ An argument exists that, to collect data/costs on one subset of the population without collecting comparable data on the overall population, renders that data meaningless.
- ▶ The data available is mostly federal and/or state based and not specific to cities.

## **CONCLUSIONS BASED ON THE DATA WE WERE ABLE TO ACCESS INCLUDE:**

Fiscally, foreign-born residents in Fargo contributed \$542.8 million to the metro's GDP in 2014 and had spending power of \$149.4 million, according to data recently released by *New American Economy*.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to the cost of resettling newcomers, North Dakota performs better than most other states. According to a study done by *National Academies of Science*, on average nationally, second and third generation immigrants provided a return on investment for individuals and households, while first generations incurred a cost. However, in North Dakota return on investment in both of those categories happens in the first generation, meaning there is never a time when immigrants are not contributing to North Dakota's economy.

On average, a first generation immigrant is cost positive in North Dakota by approximately \$3,250 per individual.<sup>2</sup> That is the second highest cost positive average in the country. While the report does not specify why North Dakota performs so well, the FHRC's conclusions are this number includes all foreign-born people in North Dakota including doctors, professors, and other highly educated/skilled people. Additionally, the FHRC also concludes that refugees also do quite well in North Dakota due to the very low unemployment rate.

This positive trend in North Dakota for first generation immigrants continues amongst households.<sup>3</sup> Where again, North Dakota is the second most cost positive state in the country, with an average of approximately \$4,900 per household. The study notes, “The key driver of differences has to do with education costs – the largest single part of state and local expenditures.”<sup>4</sup> Based on that, the FHRC further concludes that North Dakota’s strong school systems are leading to strong educational outcomes among our newest residents, providing them an opportunity to integrate quickly and make greater contributions to the community’s vitality.

In addition to their positive fiscal impact, refugees are helping the local economy in Fargo by supplementing the workforce. Jim Gartin, President and CEO of the Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corporation, stated one of the major issues effecting Fargo’s economy is the workforce, of which there is a shortage of workers in the region. He stated companies have opened satellite locations or outsourced portions of their business to areas where they can find employees. The *2015 Regional Workforce Study: Greater Fargo/Moorhead Region*,<sup>5</sup> commissioned by the Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corporation, United Way of Cass-Clay, the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce and FM Area Foundation, projects the number of unfilled jobs by 2020 will reach 30,000. Mr. Gartin believes refugee resettlement and immigration, in general, will continue to play an important role in helping to alleviate the workforce shortage.

In addition, the work group spoke with several employers who have all expressed a deep appreciation for their immigrant and refugee workforce. Mike Prekel, General Manager of the Holiday Inn; Mike Arntson, Plant Manager at Cardinal IG; and William Murphy, Environmental Services Manager at Sanford Health, are among a few of the employers who say their businesses would not have become what they are today without their immigrant and refugee employees.

Not only do employers appreciate new Americans in the workforce, they are also making accommodations for their adult employees to attend English Learning classes, according to Jennifer Frueh, Adult Learning Center Coordinator with Fargo Public Schools. This indicates employers view continued education of their employees as a benefit to their organizations and the community. When employers invest in English language classes for their employees, it becomes a great investment for the community. Parents can help support their kids in schools, community members can fully communicate with each other, safety is improved, and residents of all backgrounds develop a deeper sense of connection with one another.

Respect of diverse perspectives is not only the right thing to do, it makes economic sense. Studies show people that immigrate to the United States are nearly twice as likely as native-born Americans to start a business.<sup>6</sup> This activity has been thought to be limited to low-skill, entry-level sectors (such as grocery shops, restaurants, and the provision of basic services) but recent understanding indicates that immigrants also are more entrepreneurial in high-skill, high-tech sectors. As an example, 52 percent of key founders of high-tech firms in Silicon Valley are New Americans. In many ways, this work is more than workforce

development, it is also about attracting job-creating entrepreneurs. While the federal government is responsible for larger immigration policy issues such as visas and citizenship, local governments can help create a welcoming environment for people that immigrate here.

In terms of healthcare, Dr. Baird from Cass County Public Health, Dr. Espejo, and Marlene Espejo from Family Healthcare stated that, refugee health care costs are primarily covered by medical assistance and a health promotion grant, funded by the federal government and administered through Lutheran Social Services (LSS). They stated refugee health is not a public health concern, as refugees are thoroughly screened overseas and less than 1% of refugees have active infections, which are easily treated.



When it comes to crime statistics, immigration status is not collected as part of standard procedure. No hard data exists based on immigration status. However, Vince Kempf, Cultural Liaison Officer and 25-year veteran of the Fargo Police Department, says in his experience the percentage of people involved in crime amongst refugee populations does not vary significantly from other populations. This coincides with national statistics from the American Community Survey, which states that immigrants are actually less likely to commit crimes than domestically born people. The survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau shows an incarceration rate of 1.6% amongst immigrant males aged 18-39, as opposed to a 3.3% rate of domestically born males of a similar age group.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the fiscal considerations, research demonstrates there are non-economic benefits to immigration. Evidence shows diversity actually makes people smarter and more innovative. In a 2014 article from *Scientific America* entitled “How Diversity Makes Us Smarter,” researchers found people change their behavior to work harder cognitively in diverse groups, which drives innovation and better outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Educationally, diversity benefits all students, including non-minority children. The National Coalition on School Diversity’s Brief #8 specifically reviewed the effect of diversity on white students.<sup>9</sup> It found diverse classrooms led to more robust conversations; the promotion of critical thinking and problem solving skills; and higher academic achievement. White

students in diverse classrooms also experienced a diminished likelihood of stereotyping, more friendships across racial lines, and higher levels of cultural competency – all of which better prepares them for life in an increasingly diverse country. In fact, the benefits of diverse elementary and secondary schools have long lasting benefits that span generations.

Locally, 38% of students in the English Language Learners (ELL) program were born in America, which means Fargo Public Schools (FPS) would need an ELL program with or without the refugee resettlement program. Certainly, integration, whether for refugees or other populations new to Fargo, can be difficult. Dr. Jeff Schatz, Superintendent of FPS stated ELL funding is not what it should be. The program costs \$2,716,713.00, with \$719,540.00 coming from federal and state funds. An analysis of the current FPS ELL educational services indicates that an additional \$1.5 million is needed to fully meet the needs of the ELL students in the program. However, he states unequivocally, the ELL program is a worthwhile investment. Less than half of the students enrolled in ELL are refugees. Out of the 845 students enrolled in the ELL program, 414 are refugees, 110 are immigrants, and 321 fall into the “other” category, which includes U.S. born students. While local investment is needed to support an ELL program, that investment sees dividends within our community.

Immigrants and refugees make communities vibrant. Food, cultural events, and cultural diversity attract people to communities. A study called *Soul of the Community*<sup>10</sup> conducted by Gallup and The Knight Foundation found the three most important characteristics that attach people to place include: beauty, opportunities for socializing, and a city’s openness to all people. These findings mean the refugee resettlement program not only brings beauty to our community, but it can also be a force for retaining our younger generations, attracting talent, and growing economic development in Fargo.

Based on these findings, the FHRC concludes: terminating or slowing down the refugee resettlement program would have a negative cycle of effects on the City of Fargo, both immediate and long term. Immediate effects would include further exacerbating the work force shortage, requiring more businesses to leave and/or outsource their operations. Long-term effects include economic slow-down due to a loss of business revenue and creating an inability to keep our younger generation in Fargo and/or attract new talent to the area.

The Human Relations Commission acknowledges there are certain economic and social issues contributing to the difficulty of the refugee resettlement program. However, it is the conclusion of the group, that the Fargo-Moorhead area has a long tradition of facing challenges head-on and working to find solutions. The research shows resettlement is in the best interest of the area’s long-term health.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing refugee resettlement is a long-term commitment, the Fargo Human Relations Commission is dedicated to continuing its work to ensure Fargo is a welcoming community. This report is a step in that process. We commit to regular communication with the Fargo City Commission on our work, progress, and challenges. Going forward, the Fargo Human Relations Commission recommends the City Commission review and approve the following actions:

## PARTNER

The FHRC recommends that all locally elected governments have representation at quarterly meetings of LSS' New American Advisory Committee. These bodies include the Fargo City Commission, Cass County Commission, Fargo Park Board, as well as the Fargo and West Fargo School Districts. This partnership gives the Fargo City Commission and the public an opportunity to understand and have its voice heard. The Fargo Human Relations Commission also commits to have a member attend quarterly meetings.

In addition, an effort should be made to support flexibility in the federal resettlement program to use limited resources more efficiently, allowing resettlement agencies to address differences in costs associated with serving varying family sizes and circumstances.



## PARTICIPATE

One of the findings from the Regional Workforce Study is:

“The new American population offers opportunities, but needs more educational support. In many different roundtable discussions over the course of this project, participants recognized that the new American population offers a resource for employers seeking to fill certain jobs. About 1,100 refugees have

been resettled in the Fargo/West Fargo area over the past three years. Employers who have hired these new Americans had positive things to say about their work ethic. They did, however, note the need for English language acquisition and orientation to culture in the work place.”<sup>11</sup>

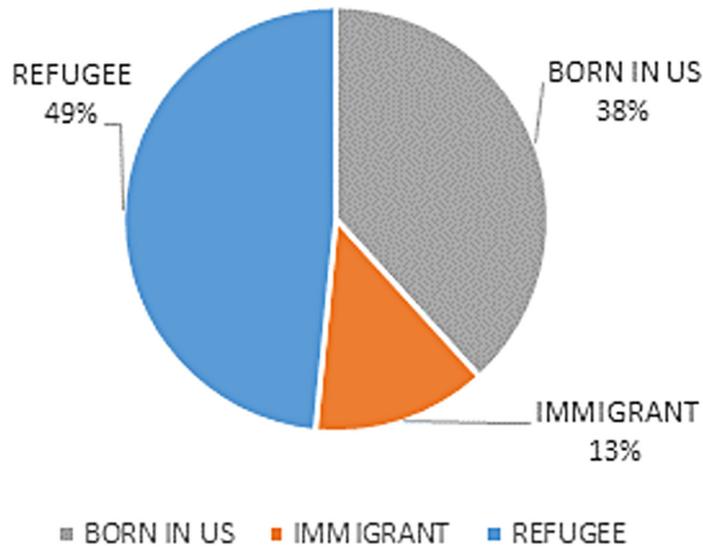
As a workforce issue, the FHRC recommends the City of Fargo expands and grows support for English Language Learning, Adult Education, and Job Skills programs. In addition, starting a business and buying a home are important steps toward building wealth and contributing to the community. The City of Fargo should work to develop a taskforce dedicated to finding ways to increase lending to new Americans interested in starting businesses and/or purchasing a home.

## INCLUDE

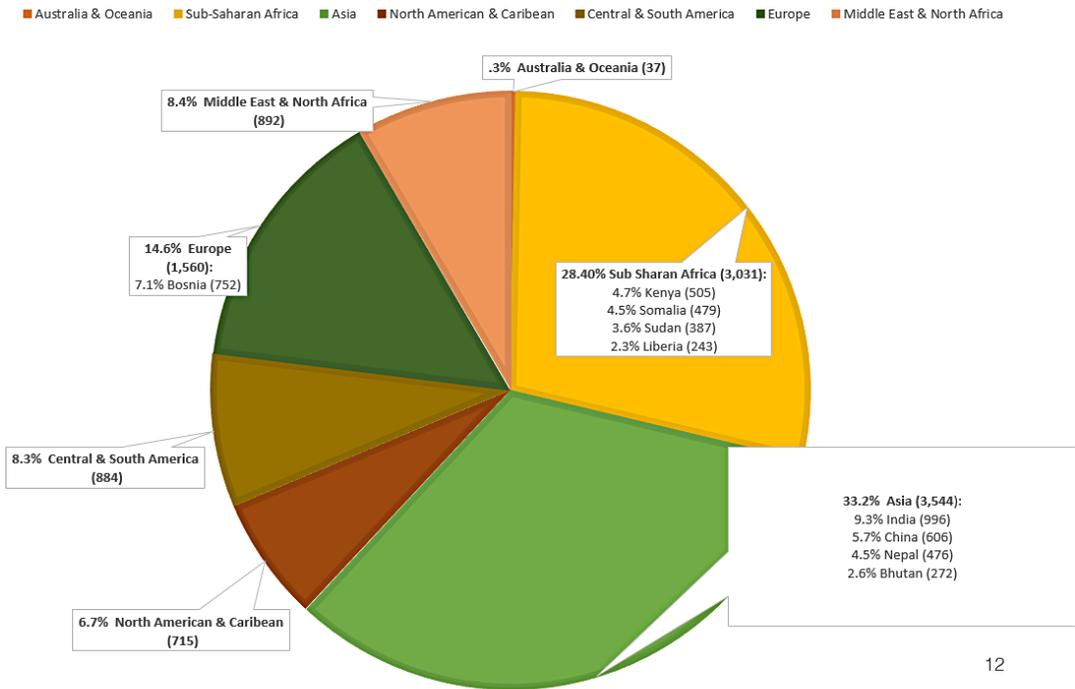
Inclusion of newcomers is a hallmark of successful cities. As a member of Welcoming America, the City of Fargo should continue its work to develop an Integration Plan. This includes studying ways to improve the integration of refugees resettled and reporting to the public. Research on the effects of early interventions, long-term self-sufficiency, and local community influence is beneficial. Such research should be undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and include refugee participation.



## 2016-2017 FPS EI Student Breakdown



## REGIONS OF ORIGIN IN FARGO



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>New American Economy. (2014). New Americans in the Fargo-Moorhead Area – A Snapshot in time of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Metropolitan Area.

<sup>2</sup>The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Pg 404-405. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/23550.

<sup>3</sup>The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Pg 404-405. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/23550.

<sup>4</sup>The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Pg 384. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/23550.

<sup>5</sup>FM Area Foundation, FM Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce, Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corp, Unite Way of Cass-Clay. (2015). The Regional Workforce Study.

<sup>6</sup>Weins, Jason; Jackson, Chris; Fetsch, Emily. Ewing Kauffman Foundation. "Immigrant Entrepreneurs: A Path to U.S. Economic Growth." <http://www.kauffman.org/what-we-do/resources/entrepreneurship-policy-digest/immigrant-entrepreneurs-a-path-to-us-economic-growth>

<sup>7</sup>Ewing Ph.D, Walter, Martinez Ph.D., Daniel, Rubbaut Ph.D., Ruben. (2015). "The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States. American Immigration Council." [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/criminalization-immigration-united-states?utm\\_content=buffercf974&utm\\_source=buffer&utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_campaign=Buffer](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/criminalization-immigration-united-states?utm_content=buffercf974&utm_source=buffer&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=Buffer)

<sup>8</sup>Phillips, Katherine B. (2014). "How Diversity Makes Us Smarter." *Scientific America*. [https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/.](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/)

<sup>9</sup>Siegel-Hawley, Genevieve. (2012). "Brief No. 8 - How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools." The National Coalition on School Diversity. <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>Morales, Lymari. (2010). "Social Offerings, Openness Key to Community Attachment." Gallup. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/144476/social-offerings-openness-key-community-attachment.aspx>

<sup>11</sup>FM Area Foundation, FM Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Fargo Moorhead West Fargo Chamber of Commerce, Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corp, Unite Way of Cass-Clay. (2015). The Regional Workforce Study. (pg 16).

<sup>12</sup>New American Economy. (2014). New Americans in the Fargo-Moorhead Area – A Snapshot in time of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Metropolitan Area.

# APPENDICES



## News Release

Contact: Vince Kempf, Cultural Liaison Officer  
Fargo Police Department  
Phone: (701) 936-4462

Contact: Willard Yellow Bird, Cultural Planner  
City of Fargo  
Phone: (701) 476-4116

### Crime Rates Not Higher in Refugee Populations

Fargo, N.D. (Jan. 11, 2017) –Fargo police officials agree with national studies that show crime rates do not vary significantly among refugee populations compared to other populations.

Vince Kempf, Cultural Liaison Officer and 25-year veteran of the Fargo Police Department, says that it is not possible for him to provide hard numbers, as immigration status is not routinely collected when a person enters the criminal justice system. However, in his experience, he believes crime rates amongst refugee populations are similar to those in other populations. Officer Kempf is the liaison to the Fargo Human Relations Commission, which has been tasked with answering what the refugee resettlement program costs Fargo.

“There are good and bad people in every population. In my experience, the ratio of persons committing crime remains the same from culture to culture. From a law enforcement perspective, the cost of refugees being placed in Fargo is impossible to calculate, as are the benefits of having refugees settled here,” Kempf states.

Officer Kempf’s assessment follows national studies closely. According to the American Community Survey, immigrants are actually less likely to be criminals than native-born folks. The survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau shows an incarceration rate of 1.6% amongst immigrant males aged 18-39, as opposed to a 3.3% rate of native-born males of a similar age group.

“I can tell you I have met many New Americans as the Cultural Liaison Officer. They have distinct cultures and speak many languages. Many experienced hunger in ways most of us will never understand and suffered much in their lives. They are here to live, work, and make their children’s lives better than what their own lives have been. I have no way to statistically measure how they benefit Fargo, but I know they do,” Kempf says.

-More-

**Continued: Crime Rates Not Higher in Refugee Populations**

The Fargo Human Relations Commission is working to answer the question of what the refugee resettlement program costs Fargo. As part of their mission, they plan to release their findings to the public on a regular basis through the end of February.

The Fargo Human Relations Commission works to promote acceptance and respect for diversity and discourages all forms of discrimination. The Human Relations Commission meets on the third Thursday of every month at 12 p.m. in the City Commission Room, City Hall, 200 3<sup>rd</sup> St. N. A public comment period is provided at the meetings. For more information, please visit the Human Relations Commission's page on the City of Fargo's website: [cityoffargo.com/humanrelations](http://cityoffargo.com/humanrelations)

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Visit the City of Fargo on the web at [www.cityoffargo.com](http://www.cityoffargo.com)



## News Release

Contact: Barry Nelson, Member  
Human Relations Commission  
Phone: (701) 388-6156

Contact: Rachel Hoffman, Chair  
Human Relations Commission  
Phone: (701) 491-0533

### Immigrants Have Positive Economic Impact

Fargo, N.D. (February 1, 2017) – State and national studies show immigrants have a positive economic impact both locally and nationally. Between 2011-2013, immigrants in North Dakota paid \$133.9 million in taxes and spent \$425.7 million, according to a study conducted by The New American Economy.

Locally, immigrants and refugees help Fargo by addressing workforce needs. *The Regional Workforce Study* (2005) reported there were approximately 6,500 unfilled jobs in Fargo-Moorhead. That number is projected to increase to 30,000 by 2020. The study conducted by TIP Strategies and commissioned by the local Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corporation, the United Way of Cass-Clay and the FM Foundation. Factors contributing to this workforce gap include: the number of people retiring, retention of young adults, and estimated population growth.

“This inability to fill jobs has been a major contributor to the slowdown in our local economy; and the refugee resettlement program has an important part to play in addressing this workforce shortage.” said James Gartin, president of the Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corp. “Cutting back on the refugee resettlement program will not benefit the Fargo-Moorhead economy. It will do the opposite.”

“Immigrants and refugees contribute to our community in a number of ways,” states Barry Nelson, North Dakota Human Rights Coalition member. “They enrich our lives with their diversity, their vibrant cultures, their wonderful food, and their positive impact on our local, state, and national economies. They want the same things that all people want -- safety, stability, and the ability to give their children good lives and educations. It would be terribly short-sighted from both a cultural and economic perspective to limit the contributions they make to Fargo.”

- More on the next page -

**Continued: Immigrants Have Positive Economic Impact**

The Fargo Human Relations Commission is researching the costs and benefits of the refugee resettlement program in Fargo. As part of their mission, they will release findings to the public on a regular basis throughout February, culminating with a presentation to the Fargo City Commission, Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at 5pm, open to the public.

The Fargo Human Relations Commission promotes acceptance and respect for diversity and discourages all forms of discrimination. The Human Relations Commission meets on the third Thursday of every month at noon in the city commission room, Fargo City Hall, 200 3<sup>rd</sup> St. N. A public comment period is provided at the meetings. For more information, please visit the Human Relations Commission's page on the City of Fargo's website: [cityoffargo.com/humanrelations](http://cityoffargo.com/humanrelations).

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## News Release

Contact: Mohamed Hussein, Assistant Director  
Jasmin Child Care  
Phone: (701) 281-6025

Contact: Rachel Hoffman, Chair  
Human Relations Commission  
Phone: (701) 491-0533

### **New American Family Starts Unique Business**

Fargo, N.D. (Jan. 25, 2017) – Jasmin Child Care is not a typical child care center. The Fargo child care center opened in January 2015 and is owned and operated by a family of immigrants. It provides unique early childhood development and preschool programming for all children and offers children of New Americans culturally-appropriate care, with an emphasis on helping children and parents prepare for kindergarten.

Rhoda Elmi learned of the shortage of childcare in the community while visiting a friend. She conducted extensive research and moved to Fargo to fulfill her dream of opening a child care center. Despite the obstacles, Elmi didn't give up. Jasmin Child Care now has 39 children enrolled and has a waiting list for infant spots.

Jasmin Child Care employs five people outside of their family and all of them are New Americans. Elmi says she's tough when it comes to hiring, and emphasizes everyone in her facility, including the cleaning staff, meet state licensure standards and adhere to strict requirements. "I ask the questions the parents would ask. I remember leaving my children in child care, how I worried. I do that work now, so parents don't have to worry," Elmi says.

The educational structure offers two distinct programs, Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training (SMART) and North Dakota Reading Corps. SMART focuses on stimulation of the brain stem versus the brain cortex by combining movement with learning. Reading Corps uses the latest research on reading intervention strategies and guidance. Reading Corps provides literacy rich instruction to all children in the classroom. This combination of programming is beneficial for children all along the learning continuum. Children who speak English as their first language benefit from exposure to other languages – Elmi's family can speak at least four languages – and students learning English benefit from hearing the fluency of their peers.

*- More on the next page -*

**Continued: New Americans Family Starts Unique Business**

The programming and small class sizes result in each student getting individual attention. Teachers at Jasmin Child Care work directly with children learning English to increase proficiency and address cultural differences before starting kindergarten.

“It’s not all about the money. It’s all about the community. We came here to help people,” Elmi says. Jasmin’s commitment to community doesn’t just end with early childhood development. They offer an afterschool program and are open seven days a week. Additionally, when the child care assistance program made cutbacks, they began offering financial assistance to those who qualify.

“When people can’t afford child care, it perpetuates the cycle of poverty. They came to us and asked for help. We couldn’t turn them away,” stated Mohamed Hussein, assistant director and Elmi’s son. In fact, Elmi and her family have become unofficial community ambassadors. If someone needs help understanding a letter from the county, meeting with their child’s school or navigating the health care system, Elmi and her family are there.

“We’re here, paying our taxes, helping our community, and we are just so grateful for all the community support we’ve received,” said Elmi. Elmi and her family are not alone in their entrepreneurial dreams. New Americans are responsible for starting 30 to 40 businesses in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Opening new businesses and identifying gaps in services for all people are just part of the positive impact New Americans have on our community.

The Fargo Human Relations Commission works to promote acceptance and respect for diversity and discourages all forms of discrimination. The Human Relations Commission meets on the third Thursday of every month at noon in the City Commission Room, City Hall, 200 3<sup>rd</sup> St. N. A public comment period is provided at the meetings. For more information, visit the Human Relations Commission’s page on the City of Fargo’s website: [cityoffargo.com/humanrelations](http://cityoffargo.com/humanrelations).

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**HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

4/2017

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