

Bridging the Gaps



Increasing Health Access Among Immigrant and Refugee Communities

Student Interns

Madison Smith, Thomas Jefferson University, Sidney Kimmel Medical College
Mary Wilkinson, Thomas Jefferson University, Sidney Kimmel Medical College

Academic Preceptor

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Community Preceptor

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COMMUNITY PARTNER

Wyss Wellness Center is a Primary Care office that serves the South Philadelphia community, with a focus on caring for immigrant and refugee populations. Wyss offers social services support, patient education, and medical care. To further assist with their mission of supporting immigrant and refugee communities, Wyss has a partnership with SEAMAAC which provides extra assistance to these individuals as they navigate life in a new country.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Approximately 800 new refugee arrivals come to Philadelphia each year¹. The refugees are then placed with one of three resettlement agencies: Nationalities Service Center, HIAS, and Bethany Christian Services. Each refugee is brought into one of eight Refugee Health Clinics in Philadelphia, in which Wyss Wellness Center serves as one. Wyss Wellness Center opened in 2021 and cared for more than 1,700 patients in its first year.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- Assisted patients with limited English Proficiency in scheduling appointments with specialists for follow-up.
- Connected patients to healthcare and social services in Philadelphia.
- Created a resource guide with links to social service organizations in Philadelphia for future use.
- Assisted with the food pantry, providing patients with fresh fruits and vegetables every Thursday
- Accompanied patients to appointments and the pharmacy
- Assisted patients in enrolling for state benefits and connected to legal services through our partnership with CLS
- Scheduled and coordinated transportation to appointments
- Scheduled uninsured patients for a free mammogram screening day

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES

Accomplishments

- Organizing a dental hygiene class at a local camp in South Philadelphia
- Partnering with Vetri Kitchen and SEAMAAC to lead a nutrition and cooking class focusing on cardiovascular health

Challenges

- Low health literacy
- Language barrier



Nutrition/Cooking class with Vetri 8/10/2023



Food pantry on 7/20/230



Dental Hygiene Class on 7/7/23

REFLECTION

1. Philadelphia Refugee Health Collaborative. (n.d.). Retrieved July 20, 2023, from <http://philarefugeehealth.org/>

Madison: I am so grateful for participating in Bridging the Gaps and getting the opportunity to work with the refugee and immigrant populations that Wyss Wellness Center serves. The most rewarding part of the role was to connect with patients and try to help them navigate the healthcare system in a new country and in a new language; to understand how challenging it is to communicate through both language and cultural barriers.

Mary: Working at Wyss was an incredibly impactful experience, and I am thankful for the seven weeks I spent here. I learned a great deal about barriers to healthcare, specifically barriers that refugee patients experience when navigating our healthcare system and also learned about services available to help people obtain access to comprehensive care. I was inspired by the team at Wyss and their dedication to all patients, no matter a patient's ability to pay. It was easy to tell that patients felt comfortable and safe at Wyss and knew that the team would do everything possible to assist them. Working at Wyss has helped me understand barriers to care and think of ways that I can help patients receive equitable healthcare in my future career.