



# Promoting Syrian Refugee Resettlement in New Jersey

yalla!



# Mission Statement

To provide a trusted, scalable online solution that connects volunteers with established relief agencies serving Syrian refugee families in New Jersey.

# Team yalla!



Yalla!, meaning “Let’s go!” in Arabic implies a sense of urgency, of movement, of getting to a destination. It also resonates with the energetic volunteer base it seeks to seamlessly connect with action-oriented relief agencies.

L: Tahi Hunter, business owner, volunteer in refugee resettlement organization.

Middle: Jodi Paroff, evaluator, public policy and services.

R: Pritha Gopalan, applied anthropologist, international development

# Background

- The Syrian conflict has waged on for over 6 years displacing 6 million citizens and forcing over 3 million Syrians to migrate overseas.
- More than 18,000 Syrian refugees arrived in the US between 2011 and 2016
  - Quota increased to 110,000 in 2017 but the new national administration halted new arrivals of Syrian refugees on grounds that they are a threat.
- New Jersey is home to almost 300 Syrian refugees.
  - NJ governor prohibited state agencies from distributing federal relief assistance to families,
  - Relief agencies, large and small, have risen to fill the void and are stretched to capacity in meeting the considerable health, educational, and financial needs of displaced families.
- National and state-level discourse against refugees has generated
  - Pro-refugee protests.
  - A groundswell of volunteerism for their cause. Volunteers range from individuals who “adopt” a Syrian family and help them navigate the difficult transition.

# Introduction

Our fieldwork was conducted among Syrian families and relief agencies working in the Paterson and Elizabeth NJ area. Paterson is home to the second largest Arab-American population in the United States and is a desired relocation destination for Syrians seeking a like-minded community.

State agencies are now restricted from distributing federal relief assistance to families, echoing mainstream nationalist sentiments. Relief agencies, large and small, have risen to fill the vacuum, and are stretched to capacity in meeting the considerable health, educational, and financial needs of displaced families.

Representatives of NJ relief agencies, namely Greater Bloomfield Interfaith Partnership (GBIP), Global Emergency Response and Action (GERA), Church World Services (CWS), and Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) have enthusiastically supported its premise, and engaged with us to inform its design (and even its name). Yalla! beckons neighbors and citizens to uphold the human values of inclusion, tolerance, and activism.

# Quotes

- “Shock of displacement is acute for Syrian refugees compared to other groups as they have been moved here within a very short period of losing their home. They need more time just to breathe.” Megan Johnson, Christian World Services
- “We founded GERA because we wanted to help refugees assimilate successfully,” Sikandar Khan, founder, GERA.
- “ I don’t want charity. I need a job!” Nour Ajouz, head of household of a refugee family in Paterson.
- “This level of civic engagement is new to us. We are in triage mode,” Salaheddin Mustafa, Outreach coordinator, Paterson mosque.

# Target Audience

## **Community Outreach Organizations**

- American citizens of various backgrounds, religious affiliations, racial makeup.
- Includes volunteers, service providers, relief agencies.

## **Intermediary Outreach Coordinators**

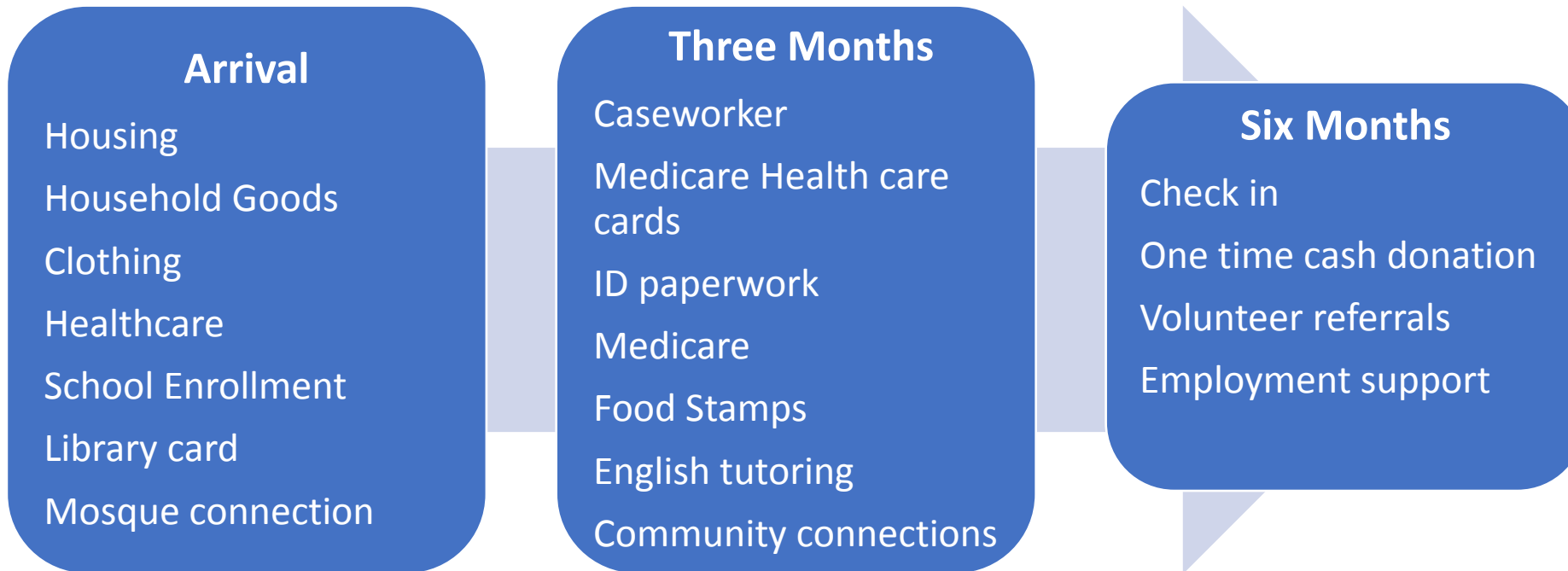
- Muslim American citizens who may be first or second generation immigrants.
- Informed on logistical and cultural challenges of resettlement and assimilation.
- Includes interpreters, business owners, students.

## **Resettled Syrian Refugee Families**

- Settled by International Rescue Committee or World Church Services in the past 2 years.

# Resettlement Map

## Timeline and Services Provided by Organized Relief Agencies





# Resettlement Gaps (needs work)

## CURRENT STATE

## GAPS

English Tutoring  
Language Translation Support  
Mental Health and Health Care  
Health Care Support  
Job Training  
Transportation

## GOALS

Happy Family  
Stable  
Employment  
Continued  
enrollment in  
formal schooling

# Yalla! Initiative

**How might we clarify the steps a family takes to “resettle”, and find other resources to meet their short term needs?**

The sum total of all essential services does not meet families’ needs.

**How might we connect volunteer resources to fill the gaps and meet a family’s longer term needs?**

**How might we organize volunteer efforts by creating a centralized infrastructure to access available volunteer services?**

The range of relief agencies services are relatively comprehensive. However, volunteer efforts are often managed using disparate methods such as Excel, text messaging, What’s App, Facebook, Signup Genius.

**How might we set up mentorship for male heads of households to navigate the American employment system?**

Men are often overqualified for the jobs that are locally available.

# Resources

- American socio-economic systems want to donate goods, time or money to provide short term services such as tutoring, moving, or driving.
- Volunteers' skills and energy are a valuable resource
  - Utilizes existing vetting processes such as background checks
  - Ease of access to online tools and resources
  - With proper coordination can be very beneficial to non-profits and relief agencies.
- Universal access to smart phones, web-based apps and websites.

# How Groups Connect

## Community Outreach Agencies and Intermediary Outreach Coordinators

- Churches, temples
- One-on-one in cafes, restaurants
- Email/Phone contact

## Resettled Syrian Refugee Families

- Mosque: Imam and community
- Gender-based communication (radio) : male head of household disseminates information
- Uber, Whats App (trusted, encrypted tools)
- Voice phone calls
- One-on-one in the home; gender-based

# Motivations

## Community Outreach Agencies

- To assist immediate needs of resettlement such as driving, shopping, school enrollment, healthcare needs.

## Intermediary Outreach Coordinators

- To facilitate communication to reduce language and culture barriers.
- To implement longer term solutions for resettlement such as networking, employment, language tutoring.

## Resettled Syrian Refugee Families

- Immediate goals: safety, shelter, connection to mosque
- Secondary goals: school enrollment, employment, transportation, health care
- Longer term goals: happy home life with stable employment and continued enrollment in schools.

# Challenges and Frustrations

## Community and Intermediary Outreach

- Organizing volunteers.
- Navigating protocol of federal, county, resettlement organizations, insurance.
- Finance; planning, fundraising, bookkeeping.

## Intermediary Outreach Respondents

- Bridging cultural gap (gender, generational).
- Longer term strategies not addressed by various groups.

## Resettled Syrian Refugee Respondents

- Trust.
- Societal construct of religion not represented in America.

# Initial Approach

Based on the research that most families had a smartphone, the original design was a peer-to-peer application

- Uber or Task Rabbit

Connected families directly to volunteers.

Pros:

Ease and independence for families

Cons:

Language, safety, and cultural barriers

Strong resistance from relief agencies on these grounds

Newly-arrived  
refugee family



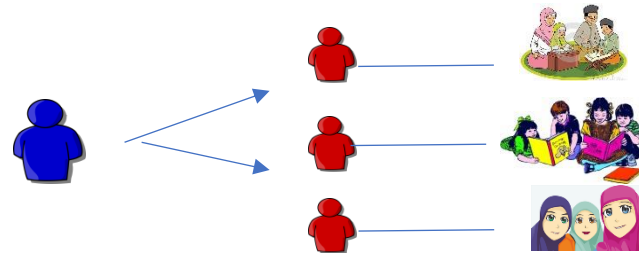
Service provider  
responds to their  
call

# Broader Approach

Relief agencies are contacted for a specific service

- Ensures an efficient one time delivery of a service to families through a skilled volunteer, for example a tutor for tutoring, someone who wants to drive for a trip to the mosque.
- Opportunity to form “relationships” rather than delivery of a service, e.g., ongoing ESL lessons.

Relief agencies vet and match volunteers to families





# Solution

Yalla! is a web-based management system that allows relief agencies to seamlessly match volunteers with Syrian refugee families in NJ.

Matching criteria:

## **Volunteer**

Level of background check / Availability and Schedule / Pre-defined skills

Attributes that identify cultural and other sensitivities such as gender, privacy.

## **Activity (pre-defined)**

Driving, shopping, financial statement review, job coaching, health care visits

## **Family Request**

Pre-defined, categorized request such as tutoring, driving, health care visits

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# Yalla! Product Roadmap



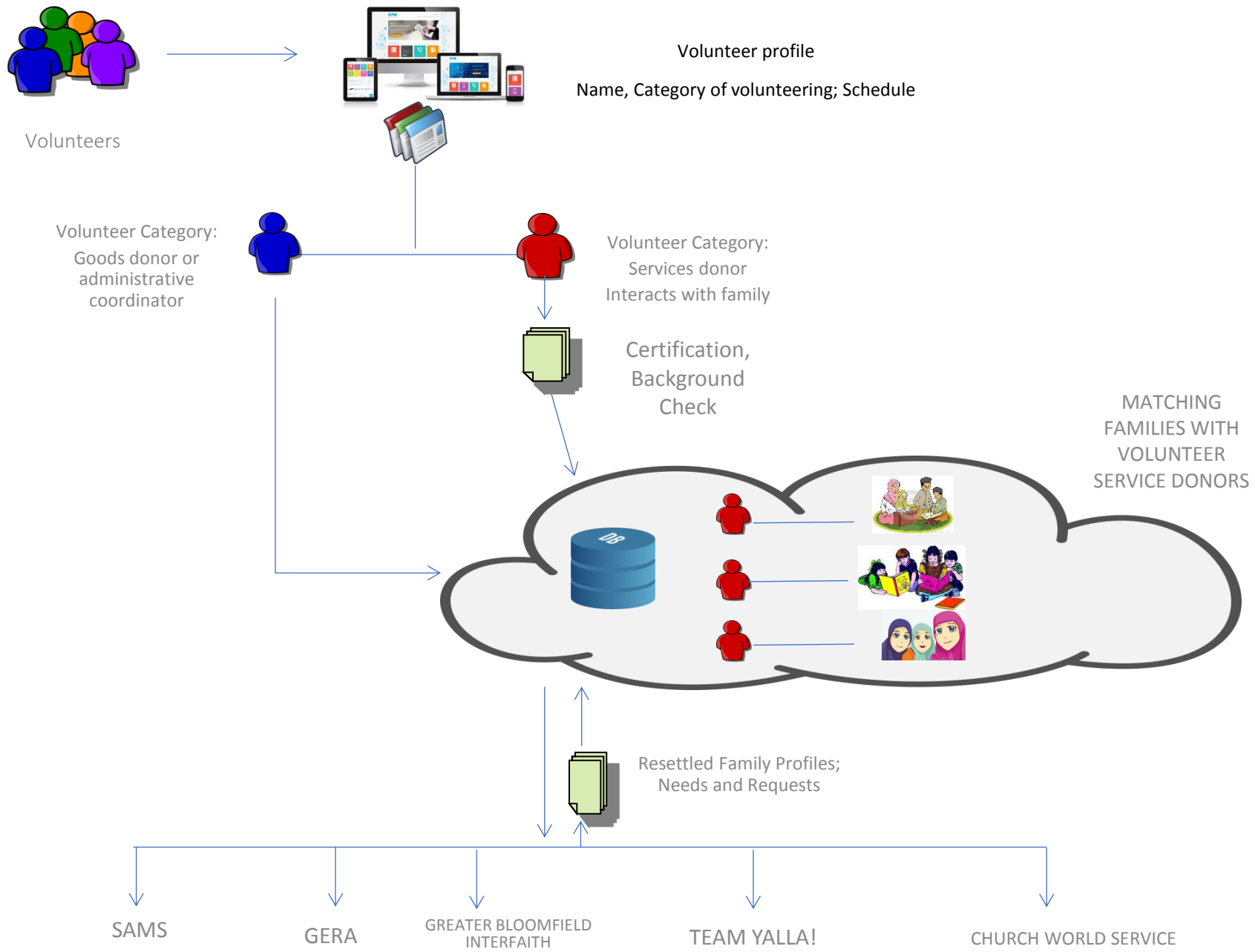
Data Collection  
Field Work  
Interviews

Design Initiation  
Feasibility Research  
Assessing Opportunities

Competitive Analysis  
Product Research  
Project Scope  
Prototype

Design and Development  
Pilot Program  
User Acceptance Testing  
Marketing Plan

Partner Engagement  
User Training  
Data Analysis



**ACTIVITIES**

- Driving
- Tutoring
- Find Housing
- Bank Statement Review
- Job/Resume Coaching
- Tea Time

ACTIVITY  
Donate Funds

Assignment 1

- Driving

Assignment 2

**January 2014**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
			December 2013		February 2014	
			1	2	3	4
			5	6	7	8
			9	10	11	12
			13	14	15	16
			17	18	19	20
			21	22	23	24
			25	26	27	28
			29	30	31	

**Family 1**

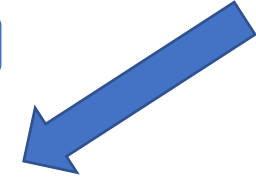
- Tea Time

**Family 2**

- Tutoring
- Driving

**Family 3**

- Job Coaching
- Tea Time



**Volunteer 1**

- Tea Time
- Find Housing

**Volunteer 2**

- Tutoring
- Driving

**Volunteer 3**

- Job Coach
- Driving