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**KAREN ANDOLINA SCOTT**  
CEO, JOURNEY'S END REFUGEE SERVICES

## Mental Health Needs of the Refugee Community

Since 2002, more than 16,000 refugees have resettled in Buffalo from countries around the world including Burma, Bhutan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Eritrea, Burundi, Liberia and more.

"Since refugees are persons who have fled their homes and countries due to war and persecution and have lost everything, it's not uncommon to see mental health issues that afflict others who have experienced severe, prolonged trauma, like veterans who served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan or children who grew up in abusive households," Karen Andolina Scott, Chief Executive Officer, Journey's End Refugee Services.

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The most common mental health challenges are PTSD, anxiety, and depression, most often the direct result of the catastrophic life changes they experienced.

The Anti-Stigma Coalition will host a [Facebook Live](#) on October 19 from noon–1 p.m. to discuss the mental health needs of the refugee community.

Panelists include La-Verne Blades, MSW, psychosocial support specialist, Jewish Family Services, Jessica Hernandez, Journeys End Buffalo, and Ahmad Rashid, a refugee from Afghanistan. The session will be moderated by Frank Camarata, executive director, Erie County Office for the Disabled.



Stigma of mental illness is often a barrier for refugees settling in a new country.

According to Andolina Scott, it's not uncommon for refugees to be fearful or embarrassed to seek help for mental health issues such as depression or PTSD. In some instances, they may come from countries where mental health supports were weak, or where mental health crises were dealt with privately within the family, or they came from backgrounds where mental

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## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



BAR ASSOCIATION  
OF ERIE COUNTY

The Bar Association of Erie County (BAEC), is a not-for-profit professional association, founded in 1887. The BAEC's goal is to advance the administration of justice through programs and services for the legal profession and the public. The BAEC is a non-partisan association made up of over three thousand lawyers and judiciary from varied practices and backgrounds, including lawyers in civil and criminal practice, corporate and trial lawyers, defense counsel, in house counsel, and those working in government, educational, and nonprofit settings.

### Anne Noble, Executive Director, on why the Bar Association is a member of the Anti-Stigma Coalition:

Mental health issues are experienced by all, and lawyers are no exception. For too long, there has been a stigma against talking about mental health in the legal community. Lawyers are historically very resistant to talking about and admitting to mental health issues, to protect their image, their reputation, and even their clients and business. Thankfully, the walls around addressing mental illness are slowly crumbling amongst lawyers and the judiciary, but we have a long way to go.

health challenges weren't viewed or diagnosed as treatable medical issues.

"Added to that is the overwhelming human imperative just to survive once they became refugees," she said. "Refugees continue to feel the pressures of having to be strong and resilient even once resettled, and it can be difficult for them to reach out for help. Language barriers also are a very big challenge in seeking mental health support, as well as finding professional services that are culturally sensitive to the special circumstances that refugees have gone through."

Three key areas are considered when thinking about mental health for the refugee and immigrant community: pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. Each phase is associated with a host of mental health considerations and experiences.

During Pre-Migration, individuals may experience childhood trauma, pre-existing mental health conditions, experience of war, torture, and other instances of trauma. Migration is particularly arduous as individuals have fled their country and are either living in refugee camps or detention facilities that are crowded, unsanitary, and short on food and other supplies. During migration, individuals and their families are also subject to kidnapping, smuggling, and other crimes. A common occurrence is separation of families or even death of loved ones. Pre-existing mental health conditions may be exacerbated and untreated as a result of lack of access to services. Anti-immigrant sentiment is commonly experienced as individuals make their way through different countries. While the Post-Migration, or resettlement, phase is meant to be a safe end to their journey, many experience loss of culture and language, continued exacerbation of mental health conditions, lack of access to services depending on legal status and income, persistent worry about friends or family who are still in an unsafe location, and continued anti-immigrant sentiment.

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Children experience the often-stressful feeling of living between cultures, putting strain on family dynamics and relationships.

Jewish Family Services Refugee & Immigrant Center for Healing (R.I.C.H.) offers many resources including the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Systems Therapy programs. Each are designed to support those who have experienced or been exposed to refugee trauma or political and state-sponsored torture.



## BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at [letstalkstigma.org/membership](https://letstalkstigma.org/membership).

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Immigrant-serving agencies and organizations are introducing new services and programs to address these concerns and start conversations about stigma in the different communities.

According to Danielle Bernas, manager of R.I.C.H. Survivors of Torture, stigma is still a major concern for those who are considering seeking out mental health services. "There has been a shift in the way services are offered," says Bernas, "in that services are being informed by the communities themselves as opposed to traditional westernized methods being the only options available."

This past year, Jewish Family Services of WNY Survivors of Torture program served individuals from over 27 countries. Conducted in partnership with Journey's End Refugee

Services, University at Buffalo Family Medicine, and the student-led Human Rights Clinic at the University at Buffalo School of Medicine, the Survivors of Torture program is based upon an intensive, strength-based, client-centered, care coordination model.

The Trauma Systems Therapy program is a multi-phased initiative to address the complex mental health needs of young refugees from elementary school through high school.

Journey's End has a program called Preferred Communities (PC) where caseworkers work with highly vulnerable refugees who have special physical, economic, and mental health needs. PC caseworkers refer clients with special mental health needs to other caregiving, accredited mental health organizations that provide culturally sensitive treatment.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 13, 10 AM – 4 PM: WNY COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS - 2022 PROJECT HOMELESS CONNECT

OCTOBER 18, 8:30 AM – 1:30 PM: 34TH ANNUAL DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES DAY

OCTOBER 19, 2 PM – 3 PM: MEET THE CANDADITES DAY

OCTOBER 22, 9 AM- 1 PM: DISABILITIES AWARENESS NON-DRIVER ID EVENT DMV

OCTOBER 24, 9AM-1PM: SENIOR SERVICES DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

OCTOBER 27, 10AM-12PM: DISABILITY / DIVERSITY CAREER FAIR

OCTOBER 28, 12PM-12:30PM: COMPEER VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER INFORMATIONAL SESSION

Visit [letstalkstigma.org/events](http://letstalkstigma.org/events) for more

ERIE COUNTY  
**ANTI-STIGMA**  
COALITION

### ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION FOUNDING MEMBERS

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.  
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County  
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities  
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County  
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation  
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