

Thought Leadership Corner – December 2016



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Reflections on Welcoming Communities Trip to Germany

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Atlanta, like many U.S. cities, welcomes thousands of refugees to our community every year. Our work at the Community Foundation supports many nonprofits that provide essential services and programs to this community. Joining the Welcoming Communities Transatlantic Exchange trip this year was a great opportunity to not only see what we're doing right locally, but to observe and think together around first-hand examples of how we can do better to support people who seek refuge here.

The Community Foundation has a long history with New American Pathways. In fact, the organization is the end result of two nonprofits merging with the help of a strategic restructuring grant from the Foundation. When asked to join Paedia, Michelle Maziar from the City of Atlanta and Iraqi refugee and current Atlanta resident Kareem Ahmed on the trip, I jumped at the chance!

There are some German communities that are facing a much greater influx of refugees in a shorter timeframe than we have seen in Atlanta. They have quickly built systems to handle the volume of people and make swift decisions in terms of language instruction, education and eventual job placement for individuals. I appreciated that those we met with shared the goal we have in our own community to fully integrate refugees into the community, not simply take the role of triage to get people placed then leave them on their own.

One critical difference in how services and programs are funded and implemented is that here in the U.S. we don't have the government support that is provided in Germany. It's incumbent on community organizations and nonprofits to fill those needs and provide pathways to success.

We must continue to build the capacity of these organizations to thoughtfully help refugees along their full journey. It's not enough to get immigrants to the point of self-sufficiency – the ultimate goal is that they are integral to their community, participate in civic life and are recognized as valued contributors.

During the trip I also had the opportunity to connect with my counterparts at the Association of German Community Foundations. It was eye opening to see the role that philanthropy plays in advancing their local communities, especially around programs for youth.

In the end, I realized that the leadership that New American Pathways provides to our region is representative of best practices seen elsewhere. We had a lot to share with others as well as to learn from them. This work is critical, now more than ever, as we continue to welcome new neighbors. It was truly a joy to gain that diversity of perspective, with many lessons we can turn to action to make our local communities stronger.

About the Program: *Welcoming Communities Transatlantic Exchange is a program sponsored by Welcoming America, Cultural Vistas and the Heinrich Boll Foundation. The program brought together delegations from refugee and immigrant receiving communities in Germany and the United States to share best practices and learn from one another. if you missed Paedia's vignettes on her experience, check them out [here](#).*