

**CT Foodshare and IRIS  
present:**

# **Serving Immigrant & Refugee Populations**

March 20, 2024



Photo: Rachel Peet for IRIS

# Goals for Today

- Introduce IRIS and our food pantry
- Define basic terms for different immigrant and refugee experiences
- Learn important context for why working with these populations requires different considerations
- Describe key strategies and tools we can use to empower these clients
- Question & answer



# About IRIS

- Nonprofit that resettles refugees and other displaced peoples
- Provides resettlement, job assistance, case management, education, English lessons, legal aid, and community sponsorship
- In 2023, resettled 1,688 individuals
- Most clients were from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, DRC, and Haiti



Photo: IRIS

# Our Food Pantry

- CT Foodshare partner since 1999!
- Currently serving an average of ~520 families per week
- 85% of patrons are community members, including many undocumented folks
- 15% are IRIS clients
- Spanish is the first language of majority of our patrons
- Pantry also hosts a weekly market of household goods



Photo: Zeenie Malik for IRIS

# Important Terms

## Immigrant

- Chooses to leave their home country
- Intends to live in the destination country
- Goes through a thorough vetting process
- May eventually become citizens of the destination country
- Free to return to their home country if they choose

# Important Terms

## Refugee

- Forced to leave their home country due to war, violence, persecution, or natural disaster
- Often must leave with little warning
- Must apply for this status outside of the US, e.g. in a refugee camp
- Qualifies for some temporary government assistance



Photo: Rachel Peet for IRIS

# Important Terms

## Undocumented Immigrant

- Broad term for folks who immigrate but don't have legal status
- Undocumented is preferred term over others
- Includes visa overstays, DACA recipients, and those who cross a border without inspection
- Most at risk group in the immigrant community



# Important Terms

## Asylum Seeker

- Some similarities to refugees but without the pre-approval process
- Journeys to a port of entry (land border or airport) and states their claim
- Can also apply for asylum from within the US in some cases
- Seeking asylum is a right under both US and international law







# Where hell and hope collide: Migrants face hostile jungl...



Share

France 24 is a French public broadcast service.



Watch on  YouTube

# How can we help?

## Focus on:

- Communication
- Culturally sensitive/trauma informed approach
- Collaborating with outside resources
- Advocacy efforts



# Communication

- “Clear is kind”
- Google Translate is free but has some language limitations
- Tarjimly is a great option for refugees, immigrants, and aid workers
- Great example from a Hartford area agency who utilized grant \$ for iPads for translation!



# Cultural Sensitivity

- Part of creating a welcoming culture for all
- Approach people and situations with curiosity, not judgment
- If unsure about offerings, great chance to survey patrons
- Example from IRIS and CT Foodshare re: halal meat
- Asking for help takes courage



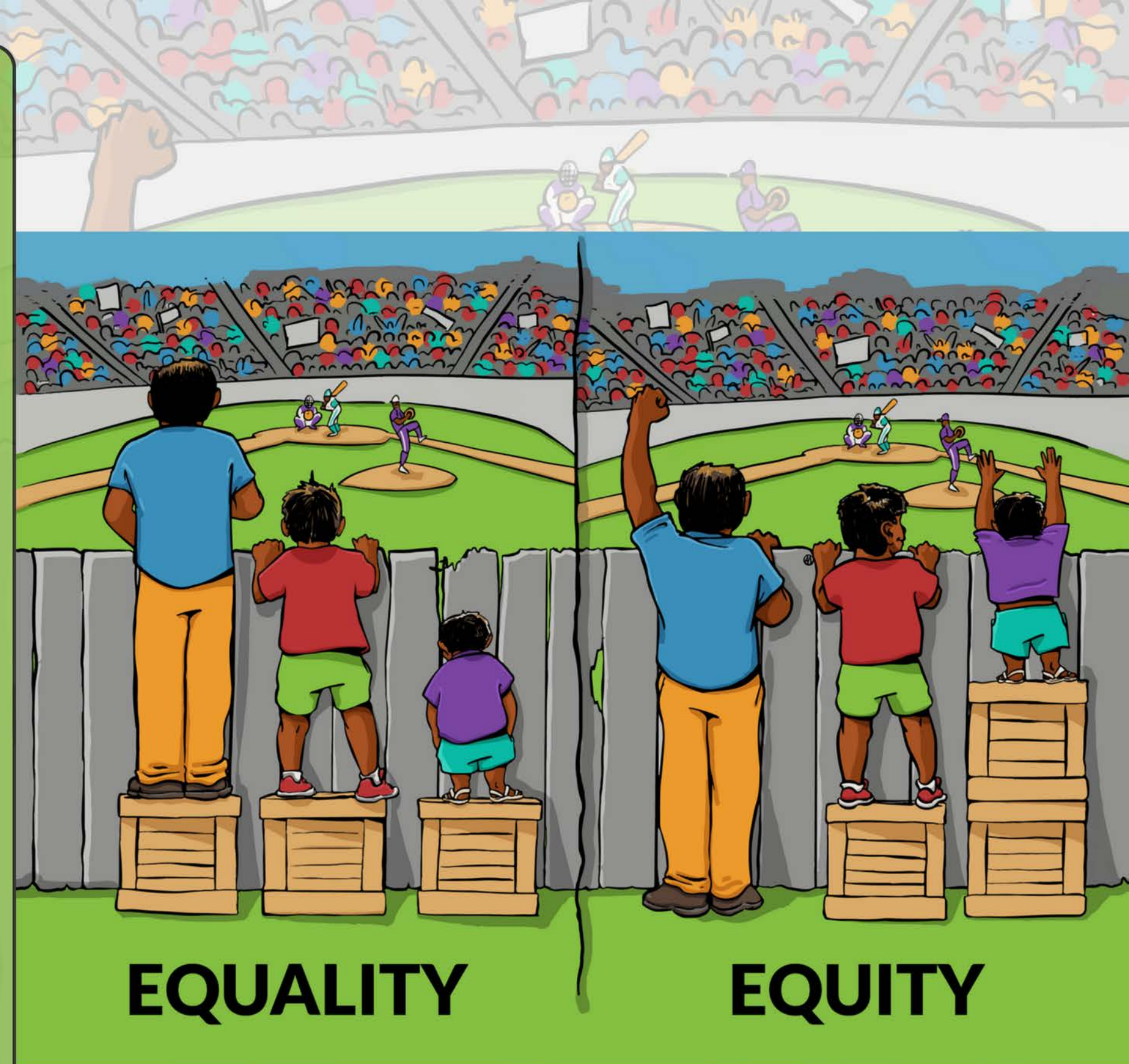
# Trauma-Informed Approach

- Originally a mental health term, but applicable for aid work as well
- Clients may be experiencing additional trauma on top of food insecurity
- Allow clients to share at their own pace
- Intention ≠ impact



# Equality vs. Equity

- Our patrons are not a monolith - each individual has different needs
- Example from IRIS' food pantry about distributing food more equitably - works in progress are allowed!
- May have to redefine what you consider a household for more equitable distribution



**EQUALITY**

**EQUITY**

# Outside Referrals

- “Collaboration, not competition”
- Most folks requiring food assistance may need other aid too
- No wheel re-invention required!
- Clothing, legal aid, school enrollment
- Great example from Hartford agency connecting with Headstart!



# Advocacy Efforts

- You don't have to be a legal expert, just an expert of your own experience
- Follow the activity of advocacy groups you trust to get ideas (HB 5011)
- In writing, state who you are, what your relationship is to the issue, your support (or not), and simple, accessible facts that support your stance





# Resource Links to Get Started

- Connecticut General Assembly
  - [cga.ct.gov](http://cga.ct.gov)
- Tarjimly (Language translation app)
  - [tarjimly.org](http://tarjimly.org)
- Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
  - [supportkind.org/what-we-do/legal-services](http://supportkind.org/what-we-do/legal-services)
- Connecticut Legal Services
  - [ctlegal.org](http://ctlegal.org)
- Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants
  - [cirict.org](http://cirict.org)
- Jewish Family Services
  - [jfsgreenwich.org/immigration](http://jfsgreenwich.org/immigration)

# Time for Q & A, but first, thank you!

Contact me at:  
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**iris**

INTEGRATED REFUGEE  
& IMMIGRANT SERVICES



Photo: Rachel Peet for IRIS