A refugee is someone who is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable to, or, owing to fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Cultural Orientation Resource Center CORC, 2017). In 2016, the 39,000 refugees were coming from Muslim countries; the Democratic Republic of Congo had 16,370, Burma had 12,347, Iraq had 9,400 and Somalia had 9,020 refugees (Krogstad, J. M., & Radford, J.). Today, 60,000 of these refugees live in Utah; over half of these are women and children. Utah welcomes somewhere between 30 - 50 new refugees each month from countries around the world.

These refugees are put into low income housing that is small and overpriced for these large families who are working minimum wage jobs. Most of these low-income apartments also don’t have parks or places for children to safely play (Cindy Newell, 2017). Acclimating to a new lifestyle can also be difficult. Many of the refugees farmed or traded goods that they made. In an urban area, there is rarely a place for gardens or practices like this. With everything so drastically different for the refugees that are resettled in Utah, the community becomes an important tool in getting them up to speed and able to support themselves.

Research and inspiration for a refugee housing community project in Salt Lake City came from some existing refugee and subsidized housing around the world, such as a modular development for 200 Syrian refugees in the German town of Winnenden by architect Werner Sobek; the Dream Neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio; Orma Social Housing Units by Alonso and Crippa. Vancouver’s fabulous vertical farm, Harvest Green, by Romans Architect; and Frankfurt, Germany’s low-rise, modular refugee housing. Researching current refugee housing and interviewing caseworkers, revealed many of the needs that the refugee population in Salt Lake City face.

These families need sustainable, comfortable, clean, reliable, and affordable housing where they can feel at home and find comfort in having their own home. I created modern, flexible, and affordable townhouses with a variety of sizes for different family sizes. These homes will surround a larger living-learning community that includes a career center with a makerspace and day care, a market, a community center with a gym and community kitchen, a library with study areas and computer rooms, a health clinic with counseling services, a large turf soccer field, playground, and sports facility. A large community garden will connect each of the buildings together and provide an area for families to grow their own produce.

I explored the idea of creating a safe haven community for these refugees, a place that will help them integrate into the community and have the opportunity to socialize with locals and become an integral part of Utah.

This community will help reduce the stress these new families face when entering the United States for the first time, and will provide a place that they can feel comfortable and secure. Having a place they can call home inside a close-knit community will allow them to learn and gain necessary skills in a safe mentoring environment and provide them with the resources to become thriving U.S. citizens.