

Public Health Social Work & the Community

When refugees and immigrants come to Massachusetts, they face many looming challenges: finding work, learning the language, accessing appropriate culturally-competent healthcare. What's more, many of these challenges build on the traumas that these populations have frequently left behind in their home countries. Serving the refugee and immigrant community is public health social worker **Lauren Shebairo** (SSW '04, SPH '05).



Lauren Shebairo

Working at the Community Legal Services and Counseling Center (CLSACC), Lauren helps various immigrant and refugee populations throughout the state, including survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence, and asylum seekers who have suffered torture and persecution in their countries of origin. She explains that "many of them have fled to the U.S. and are in legal process to get status here. As a clinical social worker, I see individuals and conduct forensic evaluations to document the psychological impact of the traumas clients have experienced in order to support their asylum cases."

On the surface, her job may seem like a traditional, individually-focused social work position. However, she explains that her MSW/MPH training has enabled her to have broader outlook, relying on human rights and international health perspectives. Lauren says, "With my training, I have greater awareness and knowledge about what people may have experienced at home and how that impacts them and their community. Even if my position doesn't have an international component, it's very much tied into my work."

Lauren insists that it is essential for professionals in public health and clinical social work fields to work together to extrapolate from individuals how useful interventions can be designed and implemented: "Clinical social work is very individually focused, and it's important for people working in the broader public health scale to be in touch with people who are working with individuals." In this way, she says, "interventions at the broadest level will really be motivated by what the individual and community needs are." With this in mind, CLSACC works with other organizations serving refugee and immigrant populations to collaborate for the most effective ways to work together.

As Lauren helps her clients overcome their past traumas and new challenges, she admits she is exposed to a lot of traumatic material. However, she shares, as she is constantly witnessing the process of change that individuals from immigrant and refugee populations experience, "it is remarkable to be able to witness the resiliency of what people are able to overcome."

The Campaign for Public Health Social Work
www.publichealthsocialwork.org

