

[Perry Stoner/Reporting]

The come from all over the world to find a better life.

[Oscar Rios/Mexico]

And so I talked to my parents. I said, I think it's the only way that I will be able to speak and understand the language is going to—to the United States.

[Maja Peci/Bosnia]

We left Bosnia because of war. We were afraid of our son's lives, so we decided to leave.

[Riek Riek/Sudan]

We left Sudan because of religious persecution and uh Islamic law that being imposed on us as Christians.

[Zainab Al-Baaj/Iraq]

We had to leave my country after the gulf war. We—we just left—we fled—That's how we did it. And thousands of us ran everywhere, every direction you can just run away from Saddam and his uh and his soldiers.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Despite diverse backgrounds, many new residents face the same barriers. They are barriers most Americans cannot begin to understand, but for new Nebraskans, they deal with them every minute of every day.

[Rios]

It's gonna be in Spanish. Uh the lyrics of the song go something like this. It's a conversation between a small plant and a little bird.

Music has kept me alive to a certain extent. Um many times I have been down because of many things in life. And music has given me a second chance per se. A different perspective in life. It brings me hope.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Oscar Rios arrived in Nebraska from Mexico in 1990. He still uses music to connect with his homeland.

[Rios]

Sometimes it gets hard and when you are far away from your land, when you are speaking a different language, when you are eating different food and interacting with different people from all over the place, it can get stressful.

[Victoria Welles---on phone]

Hi Nina, this is Victoria with Lincoln Literacy Council. I know you called us before and you wanted your friend to sign up for English classes or tutoring.

[Welles]

Language is the most important thing they need to know here. You know, if they want to function in this life and function successfully.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Victoria Welles moved to Nebraska from Russia more than ten years ago. She was fluent in English, but still had to adjust to American life. She understands how important it is for other new residents to learn the language

[Welles]

Basically we need to go from listening to speaking to reading, finally writing.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Welles trains English language tutors for the Lincoln Literacy Council. Often, they provide the first step for new residents transitioning to life in America.

[Welles]

And a lot of times our tutors get to answer questions which have nothing to do with language, you know. We become not only language teachers, but mentors.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Learning English is often the first and most important thing new residents attempt. Knowledge of language affects all other aspects of life.

[Peci/Bosnia]

You feel pretty much uh helpless. So um we decided that we need to help ourselves and that the first goal will be learn language as fast as possible, so we can starting living just normal.

[Elizabeth Nguyen/Vietnam]

I know that language barrier intimidates people. When you don't speak the language, you are very scared to go anywhere.

[Doctor's Office]

(Then speaks foreign language)

[Stoner/Reporting]

It is difficult to get good health care with a language barrier in place. Few find doctors that speak their native language.

[Doctor]

But if he gets worse, we might want to check for that.

[Interpreter]

(Then speaks foreign language)

[Stoner/Reporting]

Interpreters can help, but those services can be hard to come by around the state.

[Peci]

I had to take my son to the doctor. And that was the first time that my son got sick and I thought, oh my gosh, how—how helpless am I like—as a mother, I'm not able to help my child and that was the first move and I decided no, you really need to learn the language very very fast.

[Zainab]

Sometime, you just go like use hand—hand signal, you know. You just uh by pointing, you know, here or like I have a headache or like my heart hurts or my back. You just point to the doctor. Sometime you have nobody to go with you to translate, and it's very difficult, you know, to get your point across especially for medical things.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Few doctors speak the language of new residents. Other cultural divides can create additional obstacles.

[Nguyen]

(cupping) To warm up the muscle and to help the muscle to relax.

[Stoner/Reporting]

New residents sometimes use traditional treatments that can be misunderstood by Americans. Using heat to treat ailments is a common approach. Xay Le warms a glass cup and places it on an ill person's back. Rubbing a coin along the ribs is another treatment for colds and flue. Coining and cupping can leave marks that have been mistaken as signs of abuse.

[Nguyen]

It's something new to American people and then, um you know, if you want to know a culture or sometimes you need to live with the people of that culture for a long time to get to know, you know, that culture and some other things too. This is part of our culture, so it's not hurtful and it's very helpful.

[Stoner/Reporting]

State officials say it's important to be aware of practices newcomers bring with them.

[Dr. Richard Raymond/State Chief Medical Officer]

Their idea of health, their idea of health care and their idea of illness sometimes are quite different than what traditional American medicine looks at as health and treatment. And we have to be respectful of their—of their culture. We have to be respectful of their desires.

[Stoner/Reporting]

But new residents adapt to the American way of doing things for health care and many areas of life.

[Nguyen]

Shopping in Vietnam is different than shopping in America because we can try. We can taste before we pay. But in America, if you know, at some thought, if you do this, you can be accused of shoplifting. It's okay in Vietnam. But it's not okay here in America. So those things, my people need to know to avoid um um contact with the law enforcement.

[Rios]

Everything is different. Food is different. Uh schools are different. Streets are different. Houses are different. Everything is different. And that's something that you have to, the immigrant, you have to understand little by little.

[Nguyen]

I can see there are a lot of um intellectual Vietnamese people who um who used to be teachers, engineers, um you know, they have um college degree in Vietnam, but because of the language barrier, they, you know, they are happy with their job at Farmland or Cook or at a factories. And it's kind of sad, you know. Because I, you know, when I teach in ESL, I always tell my student that knowledge is the same everywhere, but language barrier. Language is different. You need to overcome the language barrier so you can be whoever who was in your home country, you know.

[Zainab]

I used just to dream about like is there a day gonna come that I can speak, you know, that language and I can understand what people are saying.

[Zainab—computer class]

Capital A, Z, A, A. (Then speaks Arabic)

[Stoner/Reporting]

Zainab Al-Baaj is helping some of the newest Nebraskans adjust to their new home.

[Zainab]

And we meet here and we have this computer class. We have English and we have sewing and craft class. They're typing words and letters so that way they're both learning computers and English at the same time.

[Stoner/Reporting]

The computer class is held by faces of the Middle East. It's an organization that helps those of Arabic culture adjust to America while keeping their own traditions.

[Zainab]

I think it's very important to keep the culture, the language, the religion alive with our kids. And that way, they can pass it on, you know, to their kids and so forth.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Faith-based organizations commonly assist new residents. At this Sudanese wedding, Riek Riek stood in for the Bride's father, who's still in Africa.

[Pastor]

Today, you two come together joining your destinies in a rather unique way.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Some churches even blend the cultures like at this Sudanese ceremony at First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln.

[Sudanese Pastor]

(foreign speaking)

[Stoner/Reporting]

For new residents, the mix of old and new cultures often eases the transition to America.

[Riek Riek]

In Lincoln, you know, people are very friendly. We have a lot of friends in a short amount of time, you know, people we go to church with, people we know. We have a lot of friends. People call us everyday.

We came here—America didn't have enough, but they divided it. They divided it with us, you know. Um so we are very thankful for that. And uh we always pray that there will be an opportunity that we can say thank you for giving us that. Although, we don't have thank you in my language. We don't have thank you in my language. The only thing you can say is "I'm happy."

[Amador]

(hanging photos) You start to see things different and uh you start to confront issues. Um it's helping me to get through a lot of the issues.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Amador Garres is sharpening his photography skills at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. His work represents the talents of new residents. Something others don't always understand. Like when he offered to repair the computer of an American friend.

[Garres]

He asked me, he says, do you have computers in Mexico? And I thought he was joking. And I say, are you kidding or something? He say, No I'm asking you. And I say, well yes we do. And I'm fixing his computer every time that he has a problem now. And this is the thing that amazes me that sometimes Americans do not believe in what we can offer or the knowledge that we have.

[Stoner/Reporting]

As Latino liaison for Lincoln Public Schools, Oscar Rios provides a front-line of assistance to students navigating a new life.

[Rios]

So they have difficulties understanding how the process, how the system works, so they sometimes they get a little desperate, you know, so it's good that I come here. That definitely saves us a lot of problems.

[Stoner/Reporting]

Rios takes his native culture to a wider audience through music. While it helps him connect with his birthplace, it is also a way for him to share his gratitude for what comes with being a new Nebraskan.

[Oscar]

Nebraska has given me the opportunity to learn many things. So I am thankful for that and through music, I want to be able to say to everyone, "Here we are. We have talents. We have um many things that we can share with you. It's just the fact of giving us the opportunity to do that and we will be able to do all right."

[Stoner/Reporting]

Rios and other new residents are much like those that have been coming to Nebraska for over a century. They come to start a new life and in time become a part of "The Good Life." Reporting for STATEWIDE, this is Perry Stoner.