



Welcoming Neighbor Alliance

A Community Resource Guide

Our Community is changing. It has become more culturally diverse. Please feel free to share this information widely with any welcoming neighbors who might want to learn more.



Welcoming Neighbor Alliance

A Community Resource Guide



As your public library, we are a trusted source of reliable information. We too want to be the best neighbor we can be by sharing this important information with you.



CIVIC AND SOCIAL
LITERACY

- Communities are Changing.
- Diversity has significantly increased.

The Jefferson Regional Foundation is pleased to offer this initial review of trends in the Jefferson area identified by the 2020 US Census with local outreach supported by the “Jefferson Counts” Campaign. The Jefferson Regional Foundation recognizes that place matters in regard to our health and that the social determinants of health have a significant effect on the overall wellness of our residents and region.

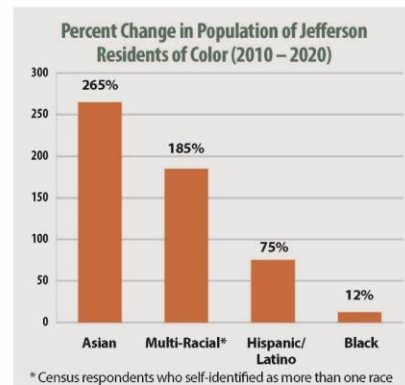
“Even where overall population change is relatively flat, there are communities in the South Hills and the Mon Valley that are seeing rapid shifts in the characteristics of their residents.”

— Chris Briem, Regional Economist, University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research

This is the continuation of a series of snapshots about our communities. The Jefferson area comprises portions of the South Hills and Mon Valley regions of Allegheny County. A map of the Foundation’s service area can be found on the second page and with previous snapshots at www.jeffersonrf.org.

Who Lives Here?

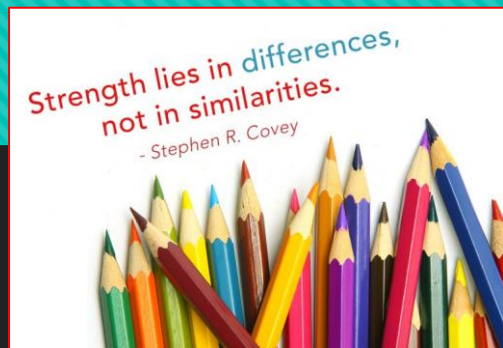
- The Jefferson area is becoming more diverse. People of color comprise 21% (44,200 residents) of the Jefferson area population according to the 2020 US Census compared to 13% in 2010.
- The white population in the Jefferson area decreased by over 8% to about 171,000 people, but still remains the area’s largest racial group.
- More than 50% of Jefferson area municipalities experienced over 100% growth in residents of color between 2010 and 2020 including: Baldwin, Bethel Park, Brentwood, Dravosburg, Elizabeth Township, Forward, Glassport, Jefferson Hills, Liberty, Lincoln, Pleasant Hills, Port Vue, South Park, Versailles, and Whitehall.



1. Populations noted represent approximately 99% of the Jefferson area population.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Census

Cultural diversity is important because our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. We can learn from one another, but first, we must have a level of understanding about each other. Learning about other cultures helps us understand different perspectives within the world in which we live. It helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups.

In addition, cultural diversity helps us recognize and respect “ways of being” that are not necessarily our own. So that as we interact with others we can build bridges to trust, respect, and understanding across cultures. Furthermore, this diversity makes our country a more interesting place to live in. As people from diverse cultures contribute language skills, new ways of thinking, new knowledge, and different experiences.



Culturally Diverse Communities are a Good Thing!

Diversity at the local level: What's been happening here?

We have community members representing the following countries and cultures:

Algeria
Bhutan
Bosnia
Burma/Myanmar
Burmese
Karen
Chin
Kachin
Mon

Burundi
Gambia
Iraq
Liberia
Morocco
Nepal
Nigeria
Rwanda
South Sudan

Sudan
Togo
Turkey



Diversity at the local level: What's been happening here?

We have community members representing the following countries and cultures:

Afghanistan	Nicaragua
Cameroon	Venezuela
Central African Republic	Uzbekistan
China	
Congo	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	
El Salvador	
Iran	
Guatemala	
Mexico	



Diversity at the local level: What's been happening here?



From the Baldwin-Whitehall School District:

One of the distinctives of the Baldwin-Whitehall School District is the rich cultural diversity students and their families bring. Over 30 languages are spoken in households in the District and students come from over 40 birth-countries.

658 current District students report Nepalese as the language spoken at home...23% of the district's elementary-age students.

<https://patch.com/pennsylvania/baldwin-whitehall/baldwin-whitehall-school-district-talking-points-enables-parent>

<https://www.post-gazette.com/life/goodness/2021/03/08/Baldwin-Whitehall-school-district-pilots-new-translation-software-goodness/stories/202102050137>

Diversity at the local level: What's happening here?

The vast majority of our newest neighbors come from Bhutan or Nepal.



Diversity at the local level: What's happening here?

If you have neighbors from Bhutan or Nepal they are more than likely refugees or former refugees.

So, what does that mean? What is a refugee and how does that differ from an immigrant?

The main difference is choice.

Simply speaking, an immigrant is someone who chooses to move, and a refugee is someone who has been forced from their home. **Refugees leave their home countries because it is dangerous for them to stay.**

Often, there are many rumors and falsehoods spread about refugees. Let's address some of these and set the record straight.

MYTH: Refugees Do Not Pay Taxes.



FACT: Refugees are subject to the same employment, property, sales, and other taxes as any U.S. citizen.

Often, there are many rumors and falsehoods spread about refugees. Let's address some of these and set the record straight.

MYTH: Refugees Take Jobs from U.S. Workers.



FACT: Recent evidence by the U.S. Labor Department says "NO" to this myth. Refugees are not provided any special treatment when obtaining employment. They must apply and compete for jobs the same as any resident of the U.S.

Often, there are many rumors and falsehoods spread about refugees. Let's address some of these and set the record straight.

MYTH: Refugees Receive Special Money From the U.S. Government to Purchase Homes, Cars, and Other Items.



FACT: The U.S. Government does not provide refugees with money when they arrive in the U.S., however, there are minimal benefits available for emergency situations and the medically needy. Those refugees must apply for these benefits and meet income and resource standards to qualify for any assistance.

Often, there are many rumors and falsehoods spread about refugees. Let's address some of these and set the record straight.

MYTH: *Refugees come to the U.S. for Economic Reasons.*



FACT: Refugees are individuals or families who have come to the U.S. because they were forced to flee their homeland, many times with little or no belongings, leaving family and friends behind and are unable to return.

Often, there are many rumors and falsehoods spread about refugees. Let's address some of these and set the record straight.

MYTH: Refugees Do Not Contribute or Participate in Society.



FACT: Refugees contribute a great deal to this country through the sharing of their talents, skills, cultures and customs. History indicates that some of our most significant contributors to the U.S. have been refugees and immigrants. And, as noted previously, refugees do pay taxes.

So why were certain Bhutanese people forced from their homes?

The Bhutanese refugee crisis: a brief history

- In the early 1990s, about 100,000 ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan were expelled or fled from the small Himalayan kingdom, leading to what Amnesty International has called “one of the most protracted and neglected refugee crises in the world.”
- Worried that the growing ethnic Nepali minority threatened the culture and political dominance of the majority Drukpa people, the government adopted a “One Nation, One People” policy in the 1980s, according to Andrew Nelson, a University of North Texas researcher specializing in Bhutanese refugees.
- The policy banned the teaching of the Nepali language in schools and required residents to dress in the traditional clothing of the Drukpa. Many ethnic Nepalis who lacked formal land titles or a record of paying land taxes back to the 1950s were denied citizenship, Nelson said.
- Those actions triggered anti-government protests and widespread political unrest. Many Nepali Bhutanese were jailed.

So why were some Bhutanese people forced from their home?

Bhutanese refugee crisis: a brief history

- A 2003 Human Rights Watch report cited cases of the government torturing prisoners, destroying houses, forcing people off their land and other abuses. The group also noted reports of some violent actions by more militant government opponents.
- Between 1990 and 1993, more than 100,000 Nepali Bhutanese, many of whom came from families that had lived and farmed in southern Bhutan for generations, wound up in refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Many languished in those camps for two decades or more before resettling in the United States.

This crisis was profiled in
the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.





Welcoming Neighbor Alliance

The Whitehall Library has worked hard to build bridges between new neighbors and long-term residents. We asked those from the local Bhutanese community to tell us more about themselves. The following information was written by the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP), explaining their culture and traditions. www.bcapgh.org/



Religion:

Bhutanese refugees are overwhelmingly Hindus with a small percentage of Buddhists and Christians. The Bhutanese rulers suppressed religious minorities and no Church exists in Bhutan. We estimate a few thousands of Christians in Bhutan who practice their faith in secret. As Hindus, we share the worship places (temples) with the bigger Hindu community from India in this County but Hindus in general do not worship in the temple regularly. They perform religious worship mostly in their homes, and some family religious events and gatherings are so big that our neighbors might feel uncomfortable.

Religion (cont'd):



Some popular festivals are Dashara/Dasain and Diwali (Festival of Light). During religious events and festivals, the priests and elders bless their younger ones and place bright colored teeka (grains such as rice or sesame seeds or sandalwood) on their forehead with flowers.

Weddings are traditionally preferred to be done at home, rather than in the temples. All relatives and neighbors are invited. We bow down to the feet of the elders and grand-parents for blessings whenever we meet. Brothers are expected to bow down to their sisters and touch their feet. It's a sin to touch your parents, grand-parents and sisters with your feet! Usually, Bhutanese Hindu families do not eat meat (includes eggs and fish) during deaths and mourning period and some abstain from eating meat for a whole year and put on a white costume. The whole community is obligated to attend the funeral which can be a challenge for the funeral home. Both Hindus and Buddhists cremate the dead.



Family:

The Bhutanese prefer to live in large joint families though nuclear and single families are getting more common these days. You can see around that most of our homes have seniors, and members from three generations living together. The married sons have an obligation to take care of their aged parents in their own homes. However, due to changing times and environment, this tradition may change.

Traditional Clothing:

Our clothing is diverse. Nobody wears the full traditional costume these days, except hats which are popular among the elders and seniors. Some women of older generations wear a thin veil on their head without covering the face. Most of the younger community members do not wear traditional clothing. Also, you may see our elders wearing nylon or woolen hats, often with a muffler wrapped around their necks, even in summer, not because they are feeling cold but because it's a habit!



Language and Literacy:

Though we are Bhutanese, we speak our ethnic language, Nepali. Bhutan has its own official language known as Dzongkha. We have a large pre-literate population, especially middle-aged to seniors, who can neither write nor read in our own ethnic Nepali language. These are the groups that community organizations like BCAP, Literacy Pittsburgh and South Hills Interfaith Movement (SHIM) work with, often in partnership with libraries.

Employment and Jobs:

Although the majority of our community members are in entry-level jobs such as food packaging, house-keeping, commercial laundry, manufacturing and at nursing facilities, many have made their way up to supervisors, registered nurses, IT, teachers and non-profit human services workers. Many of our community members also work as care-givers for the aged or disabled members of their family. We are working hard and saving money to buy homes.



Our Homes:

Bhutanese families fled our country in early 1990s, and ended up living in bamboo makeshift huts for decades or even more. We were desperately looking forward to having houses of our own. Once here in Pittsburgh, it was often difficult to get a loan approved due to lack of job history in the US and thereby no credit history. It was frustrating to get credit card applications declined or approved for a small amount.

Our families learned how to save during our time as refugees, and that ethic continued when we started jobs in this country. That, combined with borrowing from friends and families helps in purchasing homes. Many homeowners have more than one job.



Our Homes (cont'd):

We have pride in our homes and love having a yard for gardening. Our population came from an agrarian background, so having a backyard that supports vegetable gardening is very important. Similarly, growing flowers, especially marigolds is very much in our souls.

You might feel like Christmas is coming quite early with outdoor lights showing up in October or November. But that could be for a different reason which is our own ethnic festival of Dipawali or Tihar, the festival of light. But many new homeowners have also started to decorate for Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas too. We want to adjust to our new surroundings while trying to keep some traditions and culture.



Aspirations and Dreams:

As with any Americans, the Bhutanese have the aspiration of reaching the American dream! They lost citizenship and became stateless, which is a primary reason why the Bhutanese refugees have the highest rate of naturalization after resettlement. The community has been trying their best to integrate well by becoming citizens and buying homes.

Our Plea:

The Bhutanese are proud Americans and want to participate in a democratic society. We want to be good neighbors, and we are also proud of our culture and heritage.

Many neighbors are now naturalized American citizens. Two of those naturalization ceremonies were hosted at the Whitehall Public Library!



Whitehall Community Room - Photo: South Hills Record

Eligibility for U. S. Citizenship:

To apply for naturalization to become a U.S. citizen, you must:

- Be at least 18 years of age at the time you file the application;
- Have been a lawful permanent resident for the past three or five years (depending on which naturalization category you are applying under);
- Have continuous residence and physical presence in the United States;
- Be able to read, write, and speak basic English;
- Demonstrate good moral character;
- Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government;
- Demonstrate a loyalty to the principles of the U.S. Constitution; and
- Be willing to take the Oath of Allegiance.

Below is a list of suggested ideas for supporting community diversity:

- Share this resource guide, widely!
- Contact your local legislators and let them know that you support diversity in your community.
- Consider volunteering or donating to a local organization that works with diverse neighbors.

Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh <https://bcapgh.org/>

Casa San Jose <https://casasanjose.org/>

Hello Neighbor <https://www.helloneighbor.io/>

Jewish Family and Community Services <https://www.jfcspgh.org/>

Literacy Pittsburgh <https://www.literacypittsburgh.org/>

South Hills Interfaith Movement <https://shimcares.org/>

- Visit any local public library for additional trusted information.
- Show your support at the polls, always remember to vote!



**Thank you for being a
Welcoming Neighbor Ally!**

www.whitehallpubliclibrary.org