Problem:
Forty-seven languages are spoken by more than 400 foreign-born students attending Fargo Public Schools. Meeting the needs of so many different cultural and language groups is difficult for a school system of approximately 10,000 students. Many refugee students suffer from emotional and behavioral problems stemming from what they witnessed during war and in refugee camps as well as challenges associated with adjusting to a new language, new culture, and new schools.

Solution:
Improve the overall school climate to ensure that refugee students can access high-quality and culturally appropriate therapeutic services; help parents connect to community mental health resources and other support services for new Americans; and increase participation by refugee parents in their children’s schools.

Program:
The Explorers Program provides group and individual therapy to students at Kennedy Elementary and Discovery Middle Schools. Additional program components include education groups in social skills and anger management, playground “coaching” to all students, an after-school support program for children and families at a neighborhood center, and referrals to community mental health services.

Impact:
Many refugee students have demonstrated improved social skills resulting in fewer disciplinary problems and better school performance. Significantly fewer students have received behavior reprimands from the principal’s office and more parents are becoming involved with school activities.