

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: BRENDAN PERRY



Brendan Perry joined LEO as a Research Associate in July of 2015. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2015 with degrees in Applied Mathematics and Philosophy. During his time at Notre Dame, Brendan held two internships that used his statistical training: the first, as a baseball operations intern for the Walla Walla Sweets, a minor league baseball team, and the other as a poverty analytics intern for CCUSA in Alexandria, VA. Originally from Los Angeles, Brendan is finally beginning to acclimate to Midwest weather as he begins his sixth year living in South Bend, IN.

What is your role at the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities?

As a Research Associate at LEO, I wear many different hats. I manage day-to-day operations for some of our active projects, acting as LEO's liaison to the partner agency. I am responsible for developing intake strategies, implementing data collection protocols, and performing data analysis. I am also involved in the internal operations side of LEO, updating the website, managing the communications list, and assisting with event preparation. I also support LEO's project development efforts by attending service provider conferences and arranging informational conference calls.

What projects are you involved in at LEO?

I primarily work on Stay the Course and RefugeeMobile. Implemented by Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW), Stay the Course is a multi-faceted college persistence program that offers low-income community college students both emergency financial assistance and individualized case management. As the lead Research Associate on this randomized controlled trial (RCT), I work to identify eligible students, analyze students' outcomes, and report significant findings. RefugeeMobile, another RCT being conducted in Texas, seeks to modernize the refugee resettlement process by providing newly arriving refugees with tailored smartphones. As we complete the enrollment for this project and approach the one-year follow-up mark, I will be analyzing economic and social integration outcomes for participants in this program compared to the control group.

Why did you join LEO?

After graduating from Notre Dame, I wanted to find a job that utilized my quantitative skillset and enabled me to make a positive impact on those around me. As I walked around the career fair senior year, I encountered many companies that satisfied my first criterion, but only one that satisfied both. In LEO, I found a dynamic office on the rise filled with intelligent people eager to use their advanced quantitative skills to show what works and what doesn't in the fight against poverty.

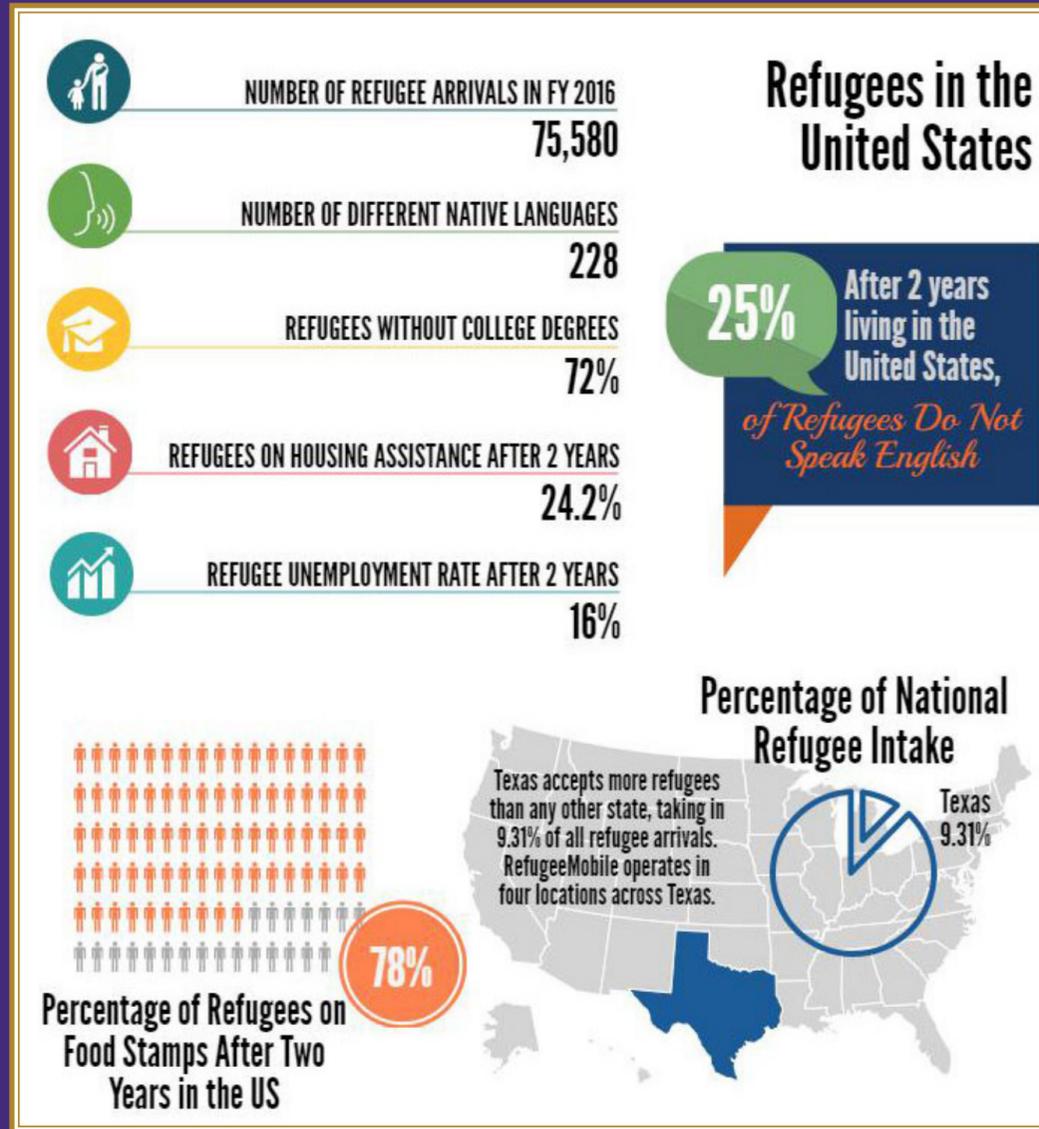


LEO IN THE NEWS

LEO's study of the impact of homelessness prevention programs on homelessness appeared in the August 12 edition of *Science* magazine. LEO partnered with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago and All Chicago to conduct this study. The results suggest that one-time payments of up to \$1500 greatly reduce

the likelihood of homelessness. The study also suggests that a reduction in income qualification could improve productivity and increase impact. Jim Sullivan presented the results of our *Science* study at a briefing on Capitol Hill on targeted assistance. LEO is currently conducting additional studies to consider the impact of homelessness prevention programs on arrest rates and

hospital admissions. The study and Capitol Hill briefing have resulted in other cities contacting LEO with similar projects for evaluation, contributing to LEO's growing portfolio of evaluation projects and breadth of impact. "You feel more confident when you talk to either donors or government agencies to have them realize that this really does work and it isn't just us saying it, but Notre Dame is standing behind it and saying it too." -Msgr. Michael Boland, President and CEO of CC of the Archdiocese of Chicago



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A MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDERS

Bill Evans and Jim Sullivan reflect on recent developments at LEO



Jim Sullivan presents the findings of LEO's HPCC study at a Capitol Hill briefing.

Four years ago this month, LEO was officially launched as an effort to identify effective anti-poverty programs in the U.S. Since then, the growth of LEO has been a lot of things: exhilarating, exhausting, and most importantly, gratifying. At launch we had one employee, Erin Byrne (who did everything), a couple of new projects just getting underway, and very little funding, but a lot of ideas. Now we have a staff of seven and scores of active and developing projects. The support we've received from the University, our colleagues at local social service agencies, other friends of LEO, and especially our partners at the Wilson Sheehan Foundation has made our extraordinary growth possible.

We are particularly excited to see our work starting to appear in print. While our goal is to fight poverty, we hope to do so by adding knowledge through our research. Over the past few months, results from two LEO projects have been published in high profile academic journals, and both include undergraduate research assistants as coauthors. Our evaluation of the Reading for Life program here in South Bend appeared in the Summer issue of the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, and our study of the Homelessness Prevention Call Center in Chicago appeared in the August 12, 2016 issue

of *Science*. This second publication is particularly significant as the journal may be the most famous academic outlet in the US, and it publishes few articles by social scientists. One big benefit of publishing in high-profile journals such as *Science* is that these articles catch the attention of key stakeholders all across the country. Last month we were invited to Washington, DC to share the results of our *Science* study at a Capitol Hill briefing. Events such as these help us to connect with both policymakers and broad networks of service providers who are interested in evidence on program effectiveness.

LEO also had the opportunity to partner with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Catholic Charities Fort Worth to present an Institute on impact evaluation at the Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering in October. This was a great opportunity to exhibit the importance of rigorous research as well as explore potential new projects with one of our largest and most established networks of providers.

Finally, we are sad to say goodbye to Research Associate Elisabeth O'Toole, who returned to her hometown of Boston and now works for our good friends at J-PAL. We wish Elisabeth well and we expect to work with her in future J-PAL/LEO collaborations. Annalise Burnett joined LEO as a Research Associate in August 2016. Annalise graduated from Notre Dame in May 2016 with a degree in International Economics with a French concentration. We are excited to have Annalise on the team!



WILLIAM EVANS, LEO Co-FOUNDER



JAMES SULLIVAN, LEO Co-FOUNDER



LEO collaborates with J-PAL and Catholic Charities Fort Worth to present at the Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering in Boston.

FACULTY AFFILIATE UPDATES

LEO's research network is comprised of faculty affiliates from universities around the country with experience evaluating anti-poverty programs. LEO identifies interesting projects and matches them to academic researchers with appropriate expertise.

BRUCE MEYER

Professor Meyer was appointed to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking by House Speaker Paul Ryan. The Commission is charged with identifying how data can be best made available and agencies encouraged to evaluate their programs with the goal of improving public policy.

MELISSA KEARNEY

Professor Kearney participated in a public forum hosted by the Brookings Institution on lessons learned twenty years after welfare reform. The forum featured some of the nation's leading experts on anti-poverty efforts. She was recently named the Neil Moskowitz Professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Maryland.

DAVID PHILLIPS

Professor Phillips recently joined Notre Dame as a Research Assistant Professor. He also recently gave a keynote address at Hope College's Critical Issues Symposium on the topic of economic inequality in a democratic society.

WILLIAM EVANS

This November, Bill Evans and LEO undergraduate Research Assistant Danny Fitzgerald will present a seminar to the staffs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) in Washington, D.C. about the integration of refugees in the US. Local Catholic Charities, under subcontracts with the USCCB, re-settle more refugees than any other US agency.

RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

EVALUATING REFUGEE MOBILE

PARTNER AGENCIES: Sparrow: Mobile for All (Sparrow), Refugee Services of Texas (RST) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS)

POLICY FOCUS AREA: Refugee Resettlement

INVESTIGATORS: William Evans

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

RefugeeMobile aims to improve the social and economic integration of refugees. The project is implemented by RST in collaboration with Sparrow at four locations in Texas. In addition to standard services, refugees in the program receive a smartphone and six months of free basic services (call, text, data). The phones are pre-loaded with apps that assist with translation, employment opportunities and banking, among other essential activities.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Access to the Internet and smart technology is increasingly important for social and economic success. Online applications for jobs, apartments, credit cards, mortgages, colleges and social programs have become the norm. Due to the expense of this technology, it is difficult for refugees to access these crucial elements of integration. The US refugee resettlement program does not address refugees' lack of access to technology. This may help explain why refugees are more likely to be low-income than native-born Americans.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

LEO is evaluating the impact of providing smartphone technology to refugees on three outcome areas—social integration, economic integration, and ease of integration. This evaluation will answer questions such as: Does access to smartphone technology decrease participants' future dependence on public welfare programs? Does access to this technology improve participants' language acquisition? Does access to this technology accelerate job placement or earnings? LEO will also consider whether the treatment decreases the participants' dependence on refugee resettlement service providers.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN:

This study is conducted as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation. Arabic- and Swahili-speaking refugees arriving at RST who consent to participate are randomly assigned into a group that receives a smartphone from Sparrow or to a group that does not receive a smartphone. LEO will collect data from case files and follow-up surveys as well as follow participants through administrative data to analyze TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, and Unemployment Insurance benefits. Phone and app data collected by Sparrow will show how refugees are using the smartphones. A post-intervention survey will be given.

PROJECT STATUS:

This project is in the data collection phase. There are hundreds of eligible refugees entering Texas each year, and Sparrow has donated nearly 100 smartphones. These smartphone recipients make up the treatment group. LEO is able to conduct an RCT evaluation because of this excess demand.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

MATT BAUER



Matt Bauer is the CEO and co-founder of Sparrow Mobile for All, a company that seeks to create digital inclusion by connecting economically disadvantaged people in the U.S. with mobile access, services, content, programs, and opportunities.

He has worked in telecommunication companies for almost 30 years and focuses on partnerships and the crossroad of impact and business. A frequent speaker on telecom, sustainability, and the future of work, he also co-edited and authored the Nonprofit Guide to Going Green. A native of South Bend, Matt currently lives in San Francisco.

Can you describe the relationship between Sparrow and RefugeeMobile?

Sparrow is a national wireless carrier offering the buy-one give-one business model to the mobile services industry and our customers - for each customer that switches to Sparrow for their mobile services, we donate a device or month of service to someone in need. RefugeeMobile is a cross sector partnership that we developed with Lutheran Immigration Refugee Services (LIRS), Refugee Services of Texas (RST) and LEO to use mobile services, devices, and apps, coupled with big data to modernize the integration of refugees settled into the U.S.

Did research affect how you designed or implemented RefugeeMobile?

Knowing that we had a proper Institutional Review Board and research team (both provided by Notre Dame and LEO) in place allowed us to dive deep and expand the criteria and outcomes for the project. We even went so far as to develop (along with the Frugal Innovation Hub in the engineering school at Santa Clara University) an app specific to this project which provides data on how much each app is being used and allows us to link back to other metrics such as higher paying jobs and faster

integration. We are also measuring how mobile and big data can strengthen and improve the relationship between the agency on the ground and its clients.

What role does research play in reducing poverty?

Over the past 50 years, the U.S. has spent over \$22 trillion fighting the War on Poverty, with mixed results. We now stand at the dawn of a new opportunity, to use mobile/apps/big data to gather data from the field, combined with other types of data and provide detailed analysis that can better inform policy, funding and above all improve livelihoods. With these new tools and pathways, research can now include both phone generated data from the field and survey data, combined with the power of new tools such as Tableau for reporting and visualizing data in ways not possible before - and at a fraction of the cost of systems and methodologies of the past.

What is your role in the LEO research study?

In the first half of the project, I worked with LIRS and RST to take it from an idea/concept to a program on paper and find funding (the project was eventually funded by a MacArthur Discovery Grant) and then I participated in some months of program design and the subsequent launch in May of 2016. While I am still involved, my colleagues at Sparrow and Mobile for All, along with Refugee Services of Texas are managing the day-to-day of the program.

How do you anticipate LEO's research study will improve RefugeeMobile?

LEO's research is pivotal in proving out the theories of change and expectations/goals that we have set for the program, which will then allow us to expand and scale both in Texas and to other regions in the coming years. Our goal is for RefugeeMobile to become a standard practice in refugee resettlement and without the proper measurement, analysis and research that would not be possible. Funders are now requiring this component for any project that is looking to scale - LEO is providing an invaluable resource to RefugeeMobile.