



Utah's Refugee Population and Disabilities: *Challenges and Lessons Learned*

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PURPOSE

1. Building disability leadership opportunities for people from refugee immigrant backgrounds.
2. Increase awareness of disability issues within refugee populations in Utah.

METHODS

1. Two fellows from diverse refugee/immigrant background (one from the Democratic Republic of Congo and another one from Lebanon) were recruited
2. Six focus groups completed with different Utah refugee communities (Sudanese, South-Sudanese, Somalian, Hispanic/Latino, Congolese, and Arabic-speaking). Below are examples of questions asked.
 - *Describe the concept/perception of disabilities from your cultural background and or life experience?*
 - *Have you found cultural differences related to the concept/perception of disabilities between your refugee community and the American society?*
 - *What are some disability related needs, issues, concerns within your refugee communities?*
 - *Do you know where to go for help and/or services related to disabilities?*

CHALLENGES

Utah has an estimated 60,000 refugees from more than 20 countries and approximately 1,100 new refugees arrive each year. Studies have documented a greater prevalence of psychiatric disorders and health problems.

REFUGEE FOCUS GROUP MESSAGES

Barriers mentioned: Lack of culturally competent delivered information about system and resources, high costs (health), distrust of Western care, different expectations, slow acculturation process, low levels of education, language and communication issues...

- “...*if the disability is not visible, (they) don't tell anybody...because it is a shame...they don't accept it.*”
- “...*there (our country of origin) we call them nicknames like no-legs...after Civil War, no help from government at all...but here in America it is different.*”
- “...*my cousin married her cousin...only three of her nine kids were born normal...they are living a miserable situation.... In the U.S. they look at them as humans...[although people] still feel a little bit of shame about disabilities because it is how they grow up with....*”
- “...*because of my disability (stuttering), I suffered a lot but it helped me to help my children at school....*”

STRENGTHS AND FELLOW'S EXPERIENCES

- High human capital background to get utilized and supported.
- New leaders from diverse groups have been identified and get involved in activities related to the field of disabilities. Additional leadership opportunities and follow-ups have been encouraged and supported.
- Informational materials were prepared and disseminated using cultural competent approaches.
- New partnerships and relationships with diverse groups and organizations have been developed.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Using local refugee community leaders to translate/interpret/facilitate was a critical bottom-up step to increase and engage our audience
- A project Advisory Board that included community leaders was helpful.
- Be flexible with time, place, days, food, incentives for events & activities.
- Be aware of different family structures of participants (single parents, large families, young ages..)
- Simple and direct take away messages like “the sooner the better” (in relation to early intervention needs and actions) was well accepted
- Relationships development is critical in the long run. It requires a lot of time, willingness, and continued efforts.

PARTNERS

- Center for persons with Disabilities (CPD) at Utah State University (USU)
- University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) at University of Utah (U of U)
- Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND)
- Cache Refugee & Immigrant Connection (CRIC)
- Refugee Organizations/communities:
 - Asian Association of Utah
 - Hartland 4 Youth & Families
 - Utah Refugee Education and Training Center
 - Catholic Community Services
 - Utah Department of Workforce Services
 - Latino Behavioral Health
 - Congolese, Somali, Afghan, Sudanese & South Sudanese Communities, among others

OUTCOMES

- Disability information was collected (via six focus groups, interviews, and the internet), prepared, presented, and disseminated to different refugee community members in a culturally competent way.
- Fellows have been mentored and supported along project activities.
- A fellow became part of URLEND training for the 2016-2017 academic year and another will continue her graduate school.
- A network of refugee leaders, organizations, and disability-related stakeholders was developed.