Refugee Resettlement: Challenges Facing Teens and Young Adults

JFCS Pittsburgh - Refugee Youth Programming Team
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Who Are We?

Jewish Family & Community Services of Pittsburgh

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Who Is a Refugee?

A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

Similar, but distinct classifications:

- Special Immigrant Visa (SIV)
- Asylee/asylum seeker (e.g., APA)
- Internally displaced person
- Stateless person
Displaced Persons by the Numbers

84 million displaced persons around the globe as of June 2021, including:

- 26.6 million refugees
- 50.9 million internally displaced people
- 4.4 million asylum seekers

Two thirds of people displaced across borders represent just five countries of origin: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (Burma).

42% of displaced persons are children

All statistics gathered from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); www.unrefugees.org
Education for Refugees

As of 2021, 48% of refugee children were not enrolled in school.

UNHCR data show the following enrollment rates for refugee learners:

- Primary school: 68%
- Secondary school: 34%
- Higher education institutions: 5%

Pre-pandemic, young refugees were 30% less likely to complete primary school, and half as likely to complete secondary school.

All statistics gathered from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); www.unrefugees.org
The Resettlement Process

FLEEING  ➔  INTERVIEWS  ➔  VETTING

These processes can take years!

- Sometimes, refugees can be repatriated into their countries of origin if the threat has ended.
- Others may be integrated into the country surrounding the refugee camp.
- When these options are not possible, resettlement is the next step.

Many refugee children were born in camps, not in their parents’ countries of origin.
The Resettlement Process, cont...

PREPARE TO RELOCATE: If refugees clear all medical and security checks, they receive cultural orientation and await their flights to the US.

ARRIVE: An assigned resettlement agency helps refugees settle into a safe home in the US and begin important steps (employment, education, etc.).

THRIVE: Over time, with adequate support, refugees integrate into their new communities.
The Roles of Refugee Resettlement Partners
The Role of JFCS

- Employment search assistance
- Housing assistance
- Health care assistance
- Public benefits assistance
- Education assistance
- Cultural orientation
- and much more
Our Refugee Youth Programs

- **BASE (Basics of Academic Success & Engagement)**
  - K-8, first six months following arrival
  - Hybrid mentoring (virtual/in-home) that engages the whole family

- **Bridge Builders**
  - Ages 5-21, enrolled after completing BASE or after approximately 6-8 months in U.S.
  - Virtual mentoring during the school year, in-person activities over the summer

- Both programs *run* on volunteers!
Barriers We Have Observed

- Language
- Technology
- Culture
- Social/Cultural Capital
- Previous access to education
- Informational/navigating pathways
- Experiences of trauma
How We Work to Reduce Barriers

- Interpreters & language support
- Technology & cultural orientations
- Support groups
- Mentoring & enrichment activities
- Coordination with schools & other programs (412 Futures, ARYSE)
- Trauma-informed care & OT support
Supporting Refugees Throughout Their Educational Careers

- Consider & evaluate barriers facing the individual student
- Take a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach
- Employ mentoring & peer support to help develop social & cultural capital
- Provide support to navigate educational pathways (Bajwa et al, 2017)
- Acknowledge intersectionality & multiple dimension/s of identity (Jones, Abes, & Quay, 2013)
Questions?