

Developing an empowering model of refugee resettlement



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Objectives

- ▶ Understand U.S. refugee resettlement policies, practices, and current realities, as they intersect with Christian faith values.
- ▶ Learn the qualitative methodology utilized in this study, from beginning to end, to develop an empowering model of refugee resettlement.
- ▶ Based on results of the study, apply social work skills to practice an empowering, anti-oppressive model of refugee resettlement.

Refugee Resettlement in U.S.

- ▶ “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.” UNHCR Definition

Political Climate vs. Faith Perspectives Refugee Resettlement

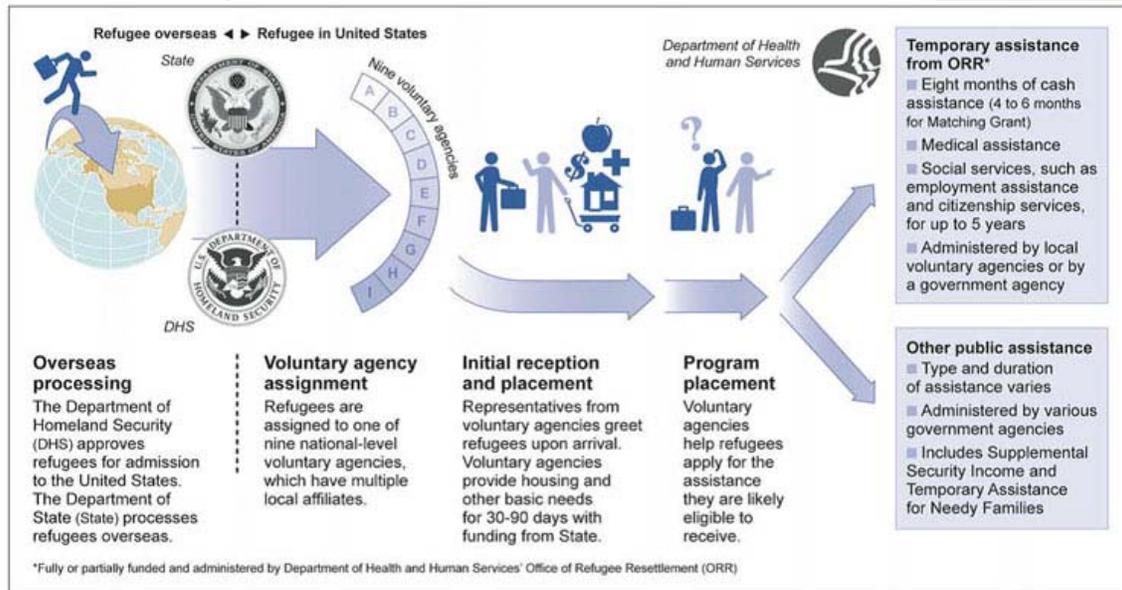
Feelings of:

- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Legal/Policy Concerns
- ▶ Economic Concerns
- ▶ Isolation vs. Welcoming Environment

Evidence of:

- ▶ Rigorous Vetting Process
- ▶ Refugees legally entering the U.S., Eligible for 90 Days of
- ▶ Benefiting our communities economically, especially where populations are in decline; Refugees receive loan for plane tickets.
- ▶ Scriptural support for loving our neighbor, welcoming the sojourner
 - ▶ Majority of resettlement agencies are faith-based
 - ▶ Yet fear and concerns re: resettlement among faith communities.

U.S. Refugee Resettlement Process



Methodology

- ▶ Qualitative, approximate one hour interviews
- ▶ 26 Participants
- ▶ 20 guided interviews
 - ▶ 19 working in refugee resettlement
 - ▶ 13 born outside the U.S.
 - ▶ 9 Former Refugees
- ▶ Transcribed and Coded for Themes
- ▶ Results presented based on perspectives of participants

This study is informed by:

- ▶ Qualitative Methodology
- ▶ Anti-Oppressive Practice
- ▶ Empowerment Theory
- ▶ Community Development Models of Practice

What does it look like for a refugee to be empowered?

- ▶ Local language skills (13)
- ▶ Financial Security (13)
- ▶ Civic Engagement/Leadership (12)
- ▶ Helping Other Refugees (9)
- ▶ Independence/Self-Sufficiency (9)
- ▶ Knowing how to ask questions/navigate system (9)
- ▶ Education (9)
- ▶ Having relationships within and outside community (7)

Number 1 signs of Refugee Empowerment

1. Career Advancement/Adequate Income
2. Community Leadership/Helping Others
3. Local language Skills
4. Transportation

Overall top signs of Refugee Empowerment

1. Adequate income/career advancement (n=12)
2. Native Language Skills (11)
3. Community Leadership/Helping others (9)
4. Transportation (5)
5. Housing (5)
6. Education (4)
7. Confidence/Self-Sufficiency/Knowing system (3)
8. Having a variety of relationships, inc. native born (2)
9. Respecting others, using skills, being listened to, keeping native culture/tongue, open to sharing problems, children empowered (1)

Refugees want career advancement in a way that helps others and helps society...

“Raif,” an interpreter, former teacher and business owner, who wants to start a business in the U.S. someday...

“You know, some people have certificate or have bachelor degrees, but here in the United States they should evaluate this certificate until they can get a job for the people that have degrees... I’ve heard some stories... a lot of (refugees) were suffering when they come here to the United States. Because the first thing they do, the case worker or the organizations or the agencies do for you to find a job after a month...So the job is just to be a laborer... I know some guys who are engineers, some are physicians, they started working in different atmospheres, and they will wait there... I’m in this process, it takes time.”

“Nazir,” former refugee who is currently shredding paper for a living, but was an exquisite craftsman and business owner... (through an interpreter)

“My passion is to give my experience to other people and to get money from this, but money is not my goal. Money is just a way to live, but my passion is to, of course, to practice my job and to get other people to learn about these things, this craft...to teach other people”

Business owners, “Amir” and “Kamal” who grew up in a refugee camp...

“(Our goals are to)expand business, being free (to) make more money than the money we’re spending....make other people like us strong...Help others, that is the main goal. Because we never forget where we come from...we just want to show all people how to work, how to be successful, if we get started, we’ll show them, we’ll lead them...with our community, all the people we know.”

What are barriers to empowerment?

- ▶ Transportation (11)
- ▶ Mental Health (10)
- ▶ Anti-Refugee Sentiment (9)
- ▶ Lack of Independence (9)
- ▶ Lack of Language (9)
- ▶ Cultural Adjustment (9)
- ▶ Isolation (8)
- ▶ Education Not Recognized (8)
- ▶ Faith Communities Methods of Helping (7)
- ▶ Time Frame of Resettlement (5)
- ▶ Prejudices within Refugee Community (4)

What does oppression look like?

- ▶ Lack of Community Education on Refugee Resettlement
- ▶ Hostile/Unwelcoming Community Members
- ▶ Refugees Not Treated with Dignity and Worth
- ▶ Systemic Oppression
- ▶ Faith Community's Methods of Practice=Bad Witness

One refugee did not feel there was any oppression due to the freedom they have here compared to where they came from, but all but one mentioned some kind of barrier that links to definitions of oppression.

The need to learn best practice methods to empower:

“Andrew” (immigrant, director of non-profit for immigrants)

“This is tricky because there’s this intersection of ministry and calling and faith and there’s this intersection of help but being clear that help is not enabling but it’s empowering help. That needs to be wrestled with and I suspect that faith based organizations, churches, have good intentions. They want to do this work, but I sometimes am not sure if they’re fully aware of how to do the work and the second thing that I would say is that too often we’ve had instances where churches are like “oh, we want to help refugees, we want to help refugees” or things and they welcome us in and then as time goes by you hear things like “you know, they’re not flushing the toilet or they’re throwing garbage in the hallway” or giving volunteers free space to do work, the reality of working with refugees I just don’t think they’re comprehending.... They just have to be prepared. I (also) think if they were less prescriptive with their funding.”

Barrier: Some Faith Communities’ Methods

“Amir” and “Kamal”, from Nepal, expressed:

“They don’t know anything here, you know, so some people they are taking advantage of them and they are **forcing them to change their religion** and making them Christian, forcing them to go to church, like they are **giving some housing stuff** and instead of that they want them to come to church and have them in church every week, once a week, something like I heard about that. Because of that many families they are frustrated... Some people **they broke their family because**... some would be wanting (this help) and others won’t be wanting.... some people come here they join the community, like they give wrong information to involve them.... and that affects their family.”

Methods of helping, hurting

"Kim" from Vietnam:

"Churches need to know that they need to be careful that if they're serving refugees that not having the refugees think that they're manipulating them into something...and some they donate meat, beef, some there donate pork, so ask them, bring a vegetable (too). Give them the choice. Tell them. Because I have seen that in the family call and they do not know how to read...and the next day they found out it is pork or it is beef, throw it in the garbage. (Give them) chicken or vegetables, noodles, vegetables, whatever. That they would eat. So the people who eat beef or pork, it can go to those people instead of to waste."

Strategies to empower refugees

▶ Relationship Building!!!!!!

▶ Starts with a ☺ and goes much deeper

▶ Equip Faith Community

▶ Educate Refugees

▶ Cultural adjustment

▶ Teach independence

▶ Educate American Born Community

▶ Help refugees to be able to use their skills/education

Through relationships we can empower the church to empower refugees...

“Alexa” (American born friend of refugees, ministry leader)

“Both having a equal hand and role in the process so I think some of it comes from how I see people. I think we’re now getting to the place, and we’re not there yet, but as we’re planning something... is it just people from my church planning it or do I get some of my friends and have them plan it? So its giving leadership and ownership to other people from other cultures. And its also not informing them what I think they need but asking people and letting them be decision makers in that process. I’ve had some friends who very passionately they came from Congo and they get really mad at Americans when they want to buy stuff for them all the time and they see it as an insult. I’ve heard them say over and over again “independence. I want to be independent.” It’s really funny because people would want to go buy them a new TV but here they say “I don’t want you to buy me a TV, I want you to teach me how to drive because that means I’m independent.” And so what we think people need and what they really need is often very different. So we listen to that.”

Examples of Refugee Empowerment

- ▶ Listening to the desires of refugees and letting them lead within these desires...
- ▶ Local professionals working with refugees with similar skills and interest
 - ▶ Business start-ups
 - ▶ Educational and/or Career Advancement
- ▶ Ethnic Organizations and Churches
- ▶ Cultural Events planned by ethnic groups
 - ▶ Mutual Learning between these organizations and American based
- ▶ Former refugees serving their own communities as leaders and professionals
 - ▶ Resettlement staff
 - ▶ Community Professionals
 - ▶ Volunteers
- ▶ Churches providing empowering resources
 - ▶ Pathways to vehicle and home ownership
 - ▶ Educational Scholarships
 - ▶ Business start-up funds

Anti-Opressive Refugee Resettlement

- ▶ Educate and Equip the Church
 - ▶ Knowledge, Values and Skills
 - ▶ Myths vs. Facts
 - ▶ Anti-oppressive practices
 - ▶ Empowerment vs. Dependency
 - ▶ Value of long-term relationships
 - ▶ Cultural Competency with Humility
 - ▶ Facilitate empowering relationships
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- Empower Refugees
 - ▶ Relationships within and outside their local culture
 - ▶ Integration, not isolation
 - ▶ Cultural Adjustment
 - ▶ Shopping, Finances, Food, Transportation...
 - ▶ Facilitate Practical Language Learning
 - ▶ Mental Health Support
 - ▶ Skill Recognition and Skill Building
 - ▶ Connect with local people with same similar skill sets.
 - ▶ Foster Leadership and Civic Engagement amongst former refugees
 - ▶ Empowering more recently arrived
 - ▶ Cultural Pride and Events
 - ▶ Entrepreneurship
- Mutually Beneficial Relationships
Lasting
Well Beyond 90 Days

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