Refugee Resettlement

25.4 million refugees worldwide
1,340 newly resettled in PA
299 resettled in Philadelphia
169 refugees from Middle Eastern countries

Background

Refugee communities experience elevated risks to physical and mental health during resettlement. Social cohesion and community engagement allow refugees to feel like they belong in their communities and ultimately has a protective effect on mental health outcomes. It has been shown that arts based curriculums, when offered in a social community setting, can increase community relationships, which in turn can increase social inclusion and belonging and potentially improve health outcomes.

According to the PA Refugee Resettlement Program, over 2,000 refugees from Middle Eastern countries have resettled in Northeast (NE) Philadelphia since 2003. Social service agencies and refugee resettlement programs are located predominantly in the center of the city, and refugees living in NE travel long distances to participate in ESL classes and other types of programming. Recognizing this need, the Porchlight Department of Mural Arts (MA) Philadelphia, which focuses on non-clinical approaches to addressing trauma and behavioral health, has established a year-long program offering free art workshops, proximal to the Arabic speaking community.

Case Study Approach

Workshop Structure

• Art and wellness activities facilitated by local artists and Refugee Health Partners at Jefferson
• Each week, the Porch Light coordinators arranged for local artists to teach community members different art forms and therapeutic techniques
• Saturday afternoons
• 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm (2 hours)
• The Exchange at Oxford Circle (second floor community space)

Stakeholders

• Responses and reflections were collected from different stakeholders including the refugee participants, local artists, the Porch Light Coordinator, the community liaison interpreter, and the RHP volunteers
• Participants were Arabic speaking refugee women, predominantly from Syria, and Iraq

Exit Interviews

• Five to ten minute exit-interviews were conducted post-workshop
• Responses digitally recorded
• An Arabic speaking interpreter was provided per participant request
• Responses and reflections transcribed

Reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>Coordinators</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I feel positive overall. The kids love to come. They can express themselves better through art. It fills up their time.”</td>
<td>“Art is a healing agent”</td>
<td>“Among our main project goals is the idea to simply reduce isolation and to help newcomers feel supported”</td>
<td>“The art serves as a great creative outlet that initiates some ESL practice”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“This is a change in my routine. This is somewhere to find new friends and to talk”</td>
<td>“Through this project we can introduce traditional and national arts and customs from our home countries of Iraq and Syria to the American community”</td>
<td>“Most participants have some kind of trauma due to relocation...Art is a universal language to address this”</td>
<td>“It has been so valuable to start to get to know the participants...I look forward to this relationship growing and helping in ways that I can as a medical student”</td>
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“What represents liberation and freedom to you?”

Discussion

• Art based curriculums are an important tool in fostering social inclusion in community settings
• Reflections and responses highlighted the need for a community space where one can socialize, change their routine, learn something new and practice their English language skills
• Participants encouraged one another in the creative process and assisted each other in ESL practice
• Strengths and Limitations:
  • Intervention is unique to Philadelphia and to the Arabic speaking community in NE Philadelphia
  • Proximity of the workshops to the participant’s homes eliminated transportation and financial barriers
  • Participant numbers were inconsistent from week to week
  • Participants were predominantly women
• Participant Suggestions:
  • Incorporation of more hands on art activities such as sewing or mosaic making
  • More structured curriculum- inform participants of the specific art activities for upcoming workshops
  • Better advertisement of workshops- widespread communication through social media/flyers

Next Steps

• Continue to attend workshops and collect additional responses from various stakeholders
• Work with Porch Light Coordinator to schedule and develop curriculum for future workshops
• Implement participant suggestions in order to improve workshop attendance and curriculum
• Draft final report for Mural Arts to be used for marketing materials, grant reports, community dissemination

Acknowledgments

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Promoting Social Inclusion Through an Arts Based Curriculum: A Mural Arts Initiative
Talia Charidah, MPH (c)
Mentor: Rosemary Frasso, PhD
Community Partner: Melissa Fogg, MSW

On Saturday afternoons, the Exchange at Oxford Circle offers an art and wellness program to accommodate the unique needs of Arabic speaking refugees newly resettled in Northeast Philadelphia. The Exchange at Oxford Circle (second floor community space) is a social community space that allow refugees to feel like they belong in their new community. This in turn can increase social inclusion and belonging and potentially improve health outcomes. The Exchange at Oxford Circle allows refugees to find new friends and to talk about their experience.

Art based curriculums are an important tool in fostering social inclusion in community settings. The art serves as a great creative outlet that initiates some ESL practice. Among our main project goals is the idea to simply reduce isolation and to help newcomers feel supported.

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