

Refugee Opportunities & Challenges- Philadelphia PA

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Background

AFAHO is a non-profit 501(c)(3) community-based organization founded to provide culturally and linguistically sensitive health, human and educational services to African and Caribbean immigrants and refugees in the Greater Philadelphia Area.



As immigrants and refugees themselves, our case managers are able to relate with our clients and often share language and cultural ties. These connections make it easier for our case managers to understand client challenges and pin point opportunities.



Strengths

- ▶ **Strong family ties:** Most refugees believe in staying together, supporting each other and being there for one another, no matter the situation. They are able to cope with challenges that come their way as they draw support from each other. This support extends to other refugee families who are in need.
- ▶ **Willingness to do any job:** Most if not all refugees are ready to take any available job as long as it is within their ability. Additionally they work hard and put their best and in due time some get to be promoted to higher roles
- ▶ **Skills:** Many of our refugee families come with many skills and contributions to American society that enhance the tapestry of Philadelphia
- ▶ **Resilience:** This is a quality possessed by most refugees as their journeys have not been easy. They are able to put up with huge responsibilities and challenges yet they still emerge energized and focused.
- ▶ **Value education:** Many of our refugee families place a great emphasis on education and are looking for more educational opportunities to take advantage of.
- ▶ **Self-Advocacy:** Many of our clients are eager to ask for help in gaining the services they need



Challenges? Yes; even Roses have thorns

- ❖ **Language barrier:** This is one of the most pervasive challenges that impact families in every aspect of life. From making friends to completing basic tasks like buying food or filling out forms, language can pose an issue. While, many refugees strive to take ESL classes, finding the time between their jobs and caring for kids can be difficult. It is even more difficult for those who weren't literate in their native tongue to begin with ESL.
- ❖ **Raising children and helping them succeed in school:** Parents often feel disappointed to see their children struggling to keep up in class, and many parents report bullying and discrimination as a result of cultural differences. Kids are often placed by their age rather than by their ability, and for those who are unable to speak English, it's virtually impossible to keep up. To add further insult to injury, parents may not have the education or language skills to assist their children, and they may not be able to communicate with faculty to address the problem.
- ❖ **Searching / Securing Jobs:** While most refugees and immigrants find it difficult to find a job, they are happy to take whatever job is available when they first enter the country. However, many of these jobs require harsh work environments, long work hours, and are not understanding of individual issues and barriers. Refugees and immigrants who are educated and/or had good jobs previously, find it frustrating that they can't obtain the same jobs here.
- ❖ **Securing housing:** Finding safe and affordable housing that fits often-large families is difficult and expensive. With the low paying jobs that many refugees have, it is even harder to afford appropriate housing. For that reason, large families or multiple families often choose to live together, creating stressful, noisy environments that are hardly conducive to studying or rest.



Challenges Cont'd

- ❖ **Accessing services:** Immigrants have an especially difficult time accessing services. Difficulty speaking English, trouble taking off work, lack of appropriate child care and limited transportation are all very real issues.
- ❖ **Transportation:** Like language barriers, trouble with transportation is an issue that affects nearly every aspect of life for refugees. Obtaining a driver's license is extremely difficult for a variety of reasons. For those who don't speak English, an interpreter/translator is needed, and they aren't always easy to come by. Also, the driver must be literate in order to pass the written exam, which is an added hurdle.
- ❖ **Mental Health:** Accessing mental health services is especially problematic. Many times, refugees have been exposed to violence, rape, and/or torture but may not know how to seek help. Furthermore, mental health issues are taboo in many cultures, creating an additional barrier for those in need.
- ❖ **Cultural barriers:** Just like transportation and trouble speaking English, cultural barriers transcend each and every aspect of life for refugees and immigrants leaving many refugees feeling like outsiders or invisible. Many individuals and families also come into post-resettlement without a great grasp on some essential aspects of US culture.

For many, the combination of all of these challenges creates a compounding effect that has made many families vulnerable, and feeling stressed and discouraged. For many single mothers of small children, such challenges have led them into undesirable situations where they are taken advantage of.



Questions?
Comments?
Concerns?

Thank You!

