

Community Building with Refugees: A Partnership Program

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Typical Profile of Refugee Families

- Impacted by having lived in unstable, unsafe environments, often for many years (war zones, refugee camps)
- Many experiences of trauma and loss
- Affected by years of limited access to basic essentials (adequate food, housing, medical care) and disrupted education and/or work
- Often experiencing various physical & mental health challenges

Stressors of Adjustment

- Resettlement brings sense of safety and new opportunities, but also has its own stressors
- Changes associated with resettlement:
 - New language (often new alphabet)
 - Different climate
 - New cultural expectations, experiences, & laws
 - New sense of identity (seen by some as an outsider, even a “terrorist”)
 - New parenting practices
 - Lack of established social network/ supports
 - Work experience & education from home country often not recognized

Community Building Program

Description

- Weekly 3 hr program (8 weeks)
- Volunteer-based program offered in partnership with local settlement agency
- Focussed on families
- Utilizes music and art as means of expression, enjoyment, and connection
- Includes English practice, including information on adaptation and coping (with interpreter to help facilitate discussion)

Goals

- Strengthen and maintain primary support group (the family)
- Help families start to build connections with other families and with local individuals and the wider community
- Provide assistance with adaptational challenges and emotional well-being



Outcomes

- Program offered for 3 different rounds (18 families; 89 participants (adults & children) all together)
- Settlement agency has continued to support the program as workers recognize benefits for clients
- Volunteers consistently report finding the experience rewarding
- Event at local library to display art created in conjunction with Global Art for Peace received positive local media coverage

Client Feedback:

- 86% of participants surveyed rated the program as Very Good or Excellent (others as somewhat good or good)
- Feedback identified the following as perceived benefits:
 - Socialization
 - Valuable family time
 - Learning about Canadian culture
 - Improving skills in English
 - Creativity in arts & music in engaging manner
 - Greater sense of belonging
 - Stress relief

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