

Resettlement Agency: The Case of the Welcome Home Community Center^{*}

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Research on U.S. immigrant and refugee resettlement has focused on some of the ways federal and voluntary organizations help new members integrate into mainstream society. Little research, if any, has explored how bridging socio-cultural gaps emphasizing immigrants' and refugees' aspirations is done. Conducted in a mid-size southern city, this study focuses on an organization funded solely by private donations in which the model is to encourage immigrants and refugees to set their own goals. The program is part of a social context for participants' strategic action planning in the process of their adjustment to U.S. society. The agency takes a transnational approach that helps participants attain cultural, economic, and educational goals.

Keywords: transnational migration, multicultural adjustment, refugee resettlement, goal setting and implementation

Introduction

Famine, natural disasters, and armed conflicts generate population displacement, with civilians often crossing national borders in search of safety. Civil wars have caused an increase in these numbers in recent decades, with civilians representing 90 percent of victims of armed conflicts (Hoffman & Weiss, 2006). Such migrants often spend extensive time in refugee camps and, if resettled to a third country, have difficulty learning a new language, culture, and the structural and legal requirements of their new homes. In the 19th and 20th centuries, resettlement agencies in the United States tended to be based on an expectation that immigrants and refugees assimilate into American culture. The "melting pot" held that newcomers should become "Americanized" by gradually losing their native cultures (Fadiman, 1997). Research has shown mixed results of this approach (Fadiman, 1997, Rumbaut, 1997, Waters, 1996; 1999), which began to change in the late 20th century toward one that incorporated native cultures and immigrants' desires and goals into resettlement programs. Scholars agree that such a transnational approach is critical in helping immigrants and refugees adjust (Scott & Cartledge, 2009; Alba & Nee, 1997; Greenman, 2011; Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Valdez, 2006; Wildsmith, 2004; Zentgraf, 2002). Research suggests the importance of understanding immigrants' and refugees' aspirations and values when analyzing resettlement programs (e.g., Fadiman, 1997; Koyama, 2015; McDonald-Wilmsen & Gifford, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Ott, 2011).

Most resettlement organizations have regular sources of funding (e.g. Catholic Charities, Jewish Refugees Services, Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Services, and World Relief Services). Little, if any, research has

^{*} Welcome Home, the names of the programs and participants are pseudonyms.

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examined the efforts of agencies that are funded solely through private donations where participants are expected to set their own goals and work toward achieving them with staff support. Our research focuses on the Welcome Home Community Center, a non-profit organization located in a mid-sized southern city and funded solely through private donations. The agency and its programs are examples of an on-going shift in global immigrant and refugee resettlement toward balancing participants' native cultures with the structural mandates of the host country.

A requirement of applicants for three of Welcome Home's programs—the Parenting Class, which was partnered with the Family Class and Individual Coaching—is that participants set goals they would like to move toward or achieve over the academic year. The purpose of this research is to examine how these programs facilitated participants' progress by balancing their need to learn legal, educational, economic, and other requirements in the United States with the norms, mores, and values of their native cultures.

Multicultural Trends in Contemporary Refugee Resettlement

During their resettlement, immigrants and refugees maintain attachments to both their native and host countries (Zimmermann, Zimmermann, & Constant, 2007). There are at least two types of interaction between immigrants and refugees and resettlement agencies (Zimmermann et al., 2007, Fadiman, 1997). The first is one in which newcomers' native cultures become problematic during resettlement (Fadiman, 1997). The second is multiculturalism, characterized by the gradual adoption of some aspects of American culture while important facets of traditional culture are maintained. Research has focused on factors that affect successful resettlement, with most scholars analyzing agencies using government funds and donations from non-profit organizations. While there has been a trend toward a multicultural approach to helping immigrants and refugees acclimate, most organizations are restricted by the conditions of their funding sources in moving clients toward self-sufficiency. The Welcome Home Community Center appears to be unique in that it is free to support participants in moving at their own pace toward the goals they set for themselves.

Theoretical Framework

Transnational theories about migration (e.g. Koyama, 2015; Levitt, 2011; Scott & Cartledge, 2009) and multicultural approaches to immigrant and refugee resettlement (e.g. Alba & Nee, 1997; Greenman, 2011; Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Waters, 1996; 1999) are central to interpreting and analyzing our findings.

Transnational Theory on Immigrant and Refugee Resettlement

When people leave their homelands, they bring their native cultures with them, and their experiences during displacement become part of their personal and collective identities. Population migration is not a linear and irreversible switch from people's homelands to the host country. What foreign-born people bring and continue to receive from their homelands (e.g., phone calls, e-mails, advice, and native foods) affects their experiences in the host country (e.g. Anderson, 2006; Hansen, 2008; Levitt, 2011; Lischer, 2005; Malkki, 1995; United States Committee for Refugees, 1991). Immigrants and refugees socio-cultural experiences involve a dialectical relationship between native cultures and connections and the demands of the host country (Levitt, 2011).

Social interactions among immigrants and refugees during resettlement depend on their transnational identities (e.g. Levitt, 2011; Scott & Cortledge, 2009). Immigrants and refugees tend to form networks within their native communities, which are particularly strong among first-generation adults. Native cultural norms

and experiences in refugee camps are likely to influence the types of goals people set and the strategies they use to achieve them. Bridging connections between existing ethnic communities with resettlement staff, volunteers, donors, and society at large are important factors in getting acclimated to a new society (Avenarius, 2012; Toma & Vause, 2014).

Multicultural Theories of Immigrant and Refugee Resettlement

Multicultural theories maintain that it is possible for immigrants and refugees to adopt American cultural standards while maintaining aspects of their native cultures (e.g. Alba & Nee, 1997; Côté et al., 2015; Greenman, 2011; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Waters, 1996; 1999). In the process of adjustment to U.S. standards, bridging transnational differences is important. Individual goal-setting may be an important aspect of such a multicultural approach.

From a multicultural perspective, bridging transnational differences during the adjustment process may be empowering for immigrants/refugees. Viewing themselves as actively involved in co-creating their multicultural identities may yield broader perspectives about possibilities in immigrants' and refugees' adjustment processes. To be successful in a multiculturalist context, transnational people are expected to find ways to maintain that which is important to them while adapting to new expectations and ways of living. Refugee resettlement is a transnational family affair (Levitt, 2011; Scott & Cartledge, 2009). A transnational perspective highlights a moral economy of kin that puts family first with strategies for collective mobility (Levitt, 2011).

Research Questions

Our central question is what happens when refugees have a voice in determining what they want or need to achieve? We are particularly interested in analyzing the programmatic success of the Welcome Home Community Center with the goal of explaining what three specific programs did that fostered goal-setting and achievement.

Methods

Our research focused on three inter-related programs. The parenting class worked with parents without their children present, teaching them about child development, how to navigate the school system and interact with teachers to help their children toward educational success. The parenting class met weekly in two sessions, one during the day for parents of young children who attended a pre-school class, and one during the evening for parents of older children. Family classes were held twice monthly with children and parents present for those adults enrolled in the parenting program. Family coaching was an on-demand service. Coaches worked one-on-one with adults to help them set, move toward, and achieve their goals.

Our research was conducted during the 2015-2016 academic year. During that time, the parenting and family classes had 45 adult participants, 40 of which were women and five were men. There were 18 pre-school and 46 kindergarten and school-age children enrolled in classes along with their parents, for a total of 109 participants in the parenting and family programs. The programs had one instructor and three assistants. Welcome Home staff did not keep records of immigrant and refugee parents' demographics, such as age, years in the United States, religious affiliation, and marital status. Based on our interviews and observations, we estimate that participants' age range was between 24 and 45 years with more than half between 30 and 40 years of age. They represented 17 nationalities from Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, and the Middle East.

Most women were single widowed mothers, primarily due to armed conflicts in their home countries. The majority of married women reported that their husbands were unable to attend the parenting and family classes because of job constraints. Two couples enrolled in the evening class. The agency enrolled couples as a unit so that the attendance of one partner was sufficient to fulfill program requirements.

We gained entrée to Welcome Home Community Center through a friend who was employed there. She arranged for us to meet with the Executive Director and other staff members who agreed to our research. The first author gathered and analyzed data. The second author directed the study. The first author was given access to online background fact sheets and other information, allowing him to gain insight to the programs. He was formally introduced to instructors, coaches, and other staff and had access to all aspects of Welcome Home except the English as Second Language (ESL) classes, which required special permission from the County Public School System. After we applied, our request for permission languished until near the end of the academic year. ESL classes are, therefore, not included in this study.

In addition to participant observation (discussed below), our data include pre-program, mid-program, and post-program interviews. Administrators conducted enrollment pre-program interviews for all participants in late July through early September 2015. Applicants were asked to establish goals they wished to work toward or achieve in the coming year, as well as signing contracts stating how they would get to class, a back-up transportation plan, that they understood that if they missed more than five classes they would be asked to drop out, and other basic ground rules. Participants spoke many different languages, including Arabic, Burmese, Chin, Dari, Dinka, French, Haitian Creole, Karen, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, and Zomi. The agency had interpreters to help candidates with enrollment interviews in their native languages. In addition, the first author conducted mid-program and post-program interviews with an opportunity sample of participants ($N = 14$), using translators as needed and enlisting a woman to be present with him and the interviewee when it was culturally appropriate. We used semi-structured interviewing techniques in an effort to gather data on people's immigration and refugee experiences, progress toward their goals (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 2-3; Mason, 1996), and an in-depth understanding of Welcome Home's mission, its programmatic philosophy, and the means administrators and staff used to help participants. Major barriers to a higher response rate were time and transportation. Participants usually arrived just before classes began and had to leave afterward to catch a bus or ride with someone else. All instructors, staff, and administrators were fully cooperative in talking with us.

In addition to participants, the family and parenting programs involved many other parties who provided support services. They included 11 administrators and staff and 10 children's instructors. We did not interview children or their teachers. Including administrators, instructors, staff, and program participants, the first author conducted 29 interviews with 25 women and four men. Those interviews included pre-program interviews with the parenting and family class instructor and three Welcome Home staff members; mid-program interviews with five staff members, five participants in the morning class, and nine participants in the evening class; and post-program interviews with three staff members, one administrator, one instructor, and one assistant instructor. The 29 audio-recorded interviews ranged from a 13-minute-long interview with a participant at the end of her class to a 75-minute-long post-program interview with an administrator. Given participants' limited availability at the agency, those interviews were 13-35 minutes long. Interviews with staff, instructors, and administrators were 35-75 minutes long with an average of 40 minutes. The average length of all interviews combined was 30 minutes. Semi-structured interviewing is an important ethnographic data gathering technique used to focus on topics of interest to researchers while leaving room for subjects to raise issues important to

them (Fetterman, 2010). The first author audio recorded and transcribed all interviews verbatim.

The first author was formally introduced to the parenting class evening session on September 29, 2015. From that day until April 19, 2016, he attended classes every Tuesday and was able to informally chat with participants in the lobby and corridors before and after classes. Such informal interaction was vital to establishing rapport and trust with program participants, who came to accept his presence as a researcher. The fact that he was an immigrant likely contributed to the bonds he established. Participant observation was appropriate as the classroom and informal interactions before and after classes comprised the natural setting for the parenting and family programs. The first author took jottings and turned them into full field notes before the end of each day. His notes included who attended classes, how they were dressed (western or traditional garb, specifically), seating arrangements, group dynamics and interactions during class and on breaks, other key information about program curricula, and flexibility in changing lesson plans to address participant goals and needs.

The school year for all classes was based on the County Public School academic calendar of two semesters that started on August 12, 2015 with a break from December 19, 2015 until January 22, 2016 and ended on May 25, 2016. During the school year, the first author's participant observation included 20 community speaker sessions; 15 evening and seven morning parenting program classes; 15 family classes; seven enrollment interviews; five community cooking sessions (in which participants shared recipes and ethnic dishes); three sessions of family coaching for first-time homebuyers; and a three-hour-long winter festival. He also observed two hour-long weekly team meetings for morning and evening classes in which children's instructors briefed the parenting and family class instructors and higher management about child dropouts, new enrollment, community activities, and any schedule changes for the children's activities. The first author observed for a total 102 hours during the school year. He entered his field notes and interview transcripts into the ATLAS.ti computer software program and conducted line-by-line coding that began with his earliest observations and analysis of pre-interviews conducted by staff. We used the constant comparative method throughout the study to identify patterns and concepts that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). While remaining open to additional themes, our focus here is to identify what the parenting, family, and coaching programs did that helped participants move toward their goals.

Findings

"Newhome", the urban area where our study was conducted, is a major destination of immigrants and refugees and, since the 1990 has ranked nationally among cities with the most federally-funded refugee resettlement programs. Welcome Home Community Center was often the organization of choice for immigrants and refugees after their initial adjustment, which was typically supported by federally-funded organizations. People came to Welcome Home Center to learn and improve English, for help negotiating the complex public school system, to study for the General Education Development (GED), for support in finding jobs or improving their employment status, and to learn about the U.S. financial system, including credit, home-buying, income taxes, and effective money management.

A significant number of parents in the program grew up and spent their early adult life in refugee camps¹, where some got married and had children. Most had been in Newhome for less than a decade. With little

¹ Out of 14 interviewed parents, 9 reported that they grew up in refugee camps.

knowledge of English, public transportation, housing, the job market, currency, or banking, credit, taxation, immigration, school, and other systems, the support they received from Welcome Home was a crucial part of their resettlement process. The majority learned about the center through friends or referrals from other agencies. Enrollment was voluntary with programs focused on participants' needs and aspirations. An administrator who started the family program in 2007 observed,

We don't call people coming here "clients" we call them "participants" because they choose to participate... So, we need to honor this choice... Whenever [Welcome Home] as an institution, whoever is working here, loses contact with participants, we must close the door because the reason we are here is about the participants. If we don't talk to them and listen to them, if we don't have a way to interact with them as a center, we don't have a reason to be.

To stay focused on participants' aspirations, Welcome Home staff conducted interviews with applicants before the academic year to help them establish goals to be incorporated into curricula. In 2015-2016, activities focused on increasing participants' English proficiency, enhancing employment opportunities, advancing adults' and their children's education, and promoting a better understanding of U.S. legal requirements. Curricula remained flexible so that participants' goals could be incorporated as they evolved or changed throughout the year.

Parenting and Family Programs

The parenting and family programs used a nationally recognized family literacy model for low income families. Using a mixed group method, the agency enrolled parents from diverse cultural backgrounds and with different levels of English proficiency in the parenting and family programs. Based on a recognition that immigrant and refugee goals are most often geared toward advancing the group rather than individual upward mobility, teaching parents how to help their children learn was central to the family-oriented approach of both programs. Further, although mixing people from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds was the only viable way to form classes, doing so encouraged participants to speak English and create networks outside their ethnic communities. The parenting class provided instruction on shopping, credit, banking, and schools. In addition, parents attended a bi-monthly family program class with their children where they worked together on projects. Pre-school parents learned how to help their children become kindergarten-ready, with projects such as counting apples into a basket and encouraging parents to teach their four-year-olds to carry their own backpacks and pull up their pants after using the bathroom. Parents of older children learned about children development and interacting with schools and agencies on their children's behalf. Seemingly routine interactions, such as responding to a teacher's note or attending a parent/teacher conference, could be daunting and confusing for participants. By supporting parents and helping them learn to help their children, the programs focused on family stability and upward mobility. As the program instructor explained,

We really want to stress to all the parents that are in our program that it's about stability for the family and focus on education, and in order to do that there are a couple of soft skills that you can learn from this program like being your child's first teacher, how do you guide them, what can you benefit from an educational program centered around child development, what skills from there can you take home and implement in your home.

The "soft skills" mentioned above included culturally appropriate disciplinary techniques. Some parents came from cultural backgrounds that supported harsh corporal punishment of children, including beating and burning. The child-rearing practices they used were sometimes illegal in the United States, and parents were often at a loss for how to discipline, control, and help their children. As one of the coaches observed, "Parents

are feeling somewhat disempowered by the social system in that way”. Instructors and coaches explained their legal obligation to contact authorities if they suspected abuse and that the ultimate goal was to make sure all children were safe. The parenting and family programs helped adults learn the legal limits of corporal punishment and offered instruction on other effective ways of disciplining and interacting with children. Parents learned how to help children with homework, even when adults’ English proficiency was less than fluent, as well as the importance of helping children learn the value of good manners, honesty, empathy, and respect.

In addition to parenting advice, and based on participant interest, instructors invited guest speakers from local organizations to make presentations on topics including home energy saving techniques, flu shots, emergency services and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), keeping immigration status legal and the application process for naturalization, first time home buyer programs, legal aid on school matters, starting a small business, saving plans, sexual and domestic violence, and health insurance.

Family Coaching Program

Family coaching used an individualized teaching model to help participants move toward and achieve their goals. Thirty-two parents in the parenting and family programs enrolled in family coaching and were encouraged to formulate and work toward more individualized goals by two professional coaches. Participants were free to modify or change goals during the academic year. Talking about parents’ goals a family coach with several years’ experience, observed,

The most important thing about the family coach program is that it is self-directed by the family leader. I am theoretically meant to be like a guide, a map for how they get where they want to go. So, for example, one of the parents has a goal of selecting a good middle school for her son. She decided on three different schools to apply to, one private and two public, and we discussed what the next steps were. And then together we will go online and I will help her complete the applications. She also has another goal around buying a home. So, we’ll discuss different steps and what will be needed from a bank perspective, like how do you select a home that is stable and solid.

Goals were selected and sequenced with the support of the family coaching team using a method known as the wheel-of-life (see Appendix 1). One of the coaches explained how the wheel-of-life worked:

If a family comes in and they are not sure what goals they want to achieve, they will fill out this [wheel of life form] and we will ask questions about it. For, example, if we were in a coaching session, if it is the first meeting I would say like from 0 = not happy at all and 10 = happy. So for your career, are you happy with it or are you not happy with it? If they say I am very happy with it, I will just do a line for 10 and we will do the same for different sections. Are you happy with your money? Your health and physical environment, do you feel safe? If you feel safe, we do a 10. Let’s say that you have a low section in fun and recreation, you have a 4; and money you have a 4 and other sections are high. We will point to it and say out of these two sections... So, we will ask like “Which section would you like to improve on?”... And I would say, “Is it something that you want to do; have you thought of different ways of doing this?” So we ask them questions about things they are already doing in order to accomplish their goals...

Working with participants to discuss their happiness with various aspects of their lives helped them identify goals and set priorities, giving them control over what they wanted to achieve.

The majority of people who set goals at the beginning or in the course of the program had either made progress toward or had achieved them. The following outlines the goals and progress of the 27 participants we interviewed.

Table 1

Summary of Steps Toward Family and Parenting Participants' Goals

Participants	Goal set	Steps toward goals
Salima	Find a school for my kids	Learned about school enrollment, visited school fair and picked three schools to choose from, had enrollment package printout, got assistance to fill out the form, mailed the forms, kids were enrolled, and kids still attend school.
Assumpta, Malika, Marie, Rodriga,	Enroll children in nearby public school	Learned about public school enrollment, learned about required supporting documents, scheduled an appointments with ESL department, kids had ESL tests, completed the enrollment package, scheduled a visit to and dropped off the package at the school, kids were enrolled and still attended at the end of the school year.
Mya	Get a driver's license	Got a translated copy of the driver's handbook in her native language, took the permit test and passed, took the road test and passed
Koffi, Lin, and Kay	First-time homebuyer	Attended guest speaker presentation, introduced to bank representative, held group and individual sessions with bank representatives about the process of first time homebuyers to ask questions,
Fiona, Hakim, Emma, Mariam, Abanur, Zahra, Abdul, Janet, Daiwa, Hawa, Buddha	Kids' head-start enrollment	Received contact information, learned about application process, learned information about required documents such as tax returns or parents' paystubs and child immunization, put together the application package, completed application forms, dropped the application package as appropriate, children enrolled
Lee, Bashar, and Josepha	Search a place to live	Learned about available apartments from online search based on desired price range, narrowed the search to desired areas usually close to their ethnic community, had assistance to make calls, scheduled apartment visits, selected an apartment, signed a rental agreement, enrolled in various utility service supply (gas and electric, water, and garbage), were still living in the apartment
Nuru, and Maya	Advance to GED	Completed advance ESL level, attended GED preparation classes, scheduled preliminary GED test and passed, had volunteers to help prepare for the GED exam, scheduled the exam and passed
Amina	Advance to GED	Completed advanced ESL, enrolled in the GED preparation, passed the GED assessment test, attended GED preparation classes, scheduled a preliminary GED test that she did not pass, had further preparation class, was getting ready to take another preliminary GED test before the final test
Nar	In a crisis of domestic violence	Was referred to counselling services, received assistance to file a case for divorce, was pressured by her ethnic community to stay with the abuser, decided to stay, worked on increasing her English proficiency, became a community liaison on various issues due to her English

Common goals in the family and parenting programs were academic and economic advancement. Individual goals included studying for a driver's license and finding support for deciding whether to divorce an abusive spouse. Common goals were incorporated into the parenting and family classes while individual goals were addressed by coaches. As the Table 1 above indicates, there was a good degree of success in moving toward and achieving goals.

Keys to Success

Broad-Based, Integrated, and Flexible Programs. Working in conjunction with ESL instructors, parents, teachers, coaches, and administrators strove to achieve group goals in classroom settings of the parenting and family programs. In a post-program interview, an administrator explained how economic, educational, and other goals were dependent upon accessing a wide range of community resources. She said,

I think the big goal for us is helping families integrate more successfully into the larger community. So, whatever that might look like for them, we are really, I think, good at helping parents and families connect to what's available in the community in terms of resources, what they can access and how they can access. We talk a lot with them about like their

rights in the society, if they have access to what their right is to those resources; educating them about the education for their children and how to be the best parent advocates for their own children; how they can further their own education and that that is possible for them. And I think also that a lot of our families really struggle with finding solid employment based on their English proficiency alone so one of the goals is to help them increase English so that they can have the opportunities.

As participants worked toward common goals in the classroom, where flexibility was built into curricula, coaches adapted to individual and family needs and goals as their circumstances changed. A program administrator spoke of the unique nature of the center's approach, compared to other agencies in the region. She said,

[...] we are not case managers. We are not going to tell them, "This is the goal you should have for your family". They are really goals that they create based on their perception of their lives at the moment. So, if they are worried about having enough money to buy food, they are probably not going to have a goal of buying a home sometime soon. It's usually the realistic expectations that they are having based on their lives at that particular moment. And that could change. I mean they could be in that very position where they don't have enough money to buy food for the family but then they get a fulltime job and so their whole situation has changed, and they are able to do that and they are able to save some money so they are looking forward to the future. That's where we see shifting in the goals.

A broad-based knowledge of resources, legal requirements and rights, and how to connect participants with the assistance they needed was central to the success participants had in progressing toward their goals. Coaches sometimes had to deal with new situations they may have been unprepared for and had to learn U.S. policies and systems. Staff had to be sensitive to navigating challenges within a transnational cultural context. Key trends showed that there were instances of successfully bridging transnational gaps, such as in the following case of domestic violence described by one of the coaches, who said,

This is two years ago now [i.e. 2014], one of the parents that I was working with filed a domestic violence order against her husband. He was actually, for other circumstances sent to prison for two years. It was more than a DVO [Domestic Violence Order]. Anyway, he was removed from the home and there was an order, they warned her to have no contact. The husband was the primary breadwinner; he was the only economic resource that the family had. She and her six children didn't have a way to support themselves. So, we were able to find assistance for them until we were also able to help her find a job. They had a small amount of money that was saved; I know for sure that we helped her pay the rent I think at least twice in the two years he was gone. We went to look for jobs a significant amount of time.

The decision-making process was left entirely to the participants. The center's role was to make sure that support mechanisms were ideally in place to allow participants make informed decisions.

In another situation that arose during the year we conducted our research, coaches worked with the wife of an abusive man. While learning her rights and what protections and resources were available, the woman came under pressure from members of her ethnic community to stay in her marriage. Recalling the situation and her efforts to empathize with the woman and respect her decisions, one of the coaches remarked,

She was thinking very seriously about divorcing her husband because of his alcoholism. And other women in her community told her, "No, you got it good. At least he doesn't cheat on you with other women. Don't mess with a good thing; it could be a lot worse".

Staff sometimes struggled with the decisions participants made, but in the end, respect for their decisions and ever-changing circumstances was the rule. The coach continued,

My perspective on [her decision], I feel worlds away from it in a lot of ways. My only way to relate to this is to think

about the way my grandparents grew up I guess, older generations of women in my community who dealt with all those kinds of things. It's almost like a lot of the people I am working with, their culture has a lot in common with the way the United States, its politics and society was in the 1940s-1950s era. That's the only reference point I have.

When the woman decided to stay with her husband, coaches and staff respected her decision, knowing that she had made it with the knowledge of available resources and her legal rights.

Strength-Based Pedagogy. The parenting and family programs utilized holistic approaches that focused on building upon participant strengths while addressing gaps in their knowledge of their rights, American culture, institutional requirements, and resources. Individual coaches and administrators employed the same philosophy. An upper level administrator explained,

It's not only that we listen to what people perceive as a need. We are also trying to figure out what are their strengths. We go from the strong position, not the weak position. So, if a family or the person shows resilience, we work from that powerful position not the weak position. I try to be clear for my staff that we are not filling gaps only. We are also developing the skills and strengths that people have. This is for me a key component. The other piece is that we are able to connect family education, English language to adults and children. We are trying to see the family as a unit, not isolated. We are trying to provide a more holistic view, not for the programming alone also for the sense of family unit. When you come to the United States, especially from cultures where you have a tribe or a clan, your life experience or your social interactions were only inside these groups.

Approaching goal-setting and curriculum development from a participant-focused strengths-based perspective, combined with individualized coaching, flexibility in class offerings, and the initial contract, appear to have been key to the movement toward and attainment of participant goals. Central to this approach was a tacit understanding of participants' transnational experiences.

Transnational Perspective. Most participants, instructors, coaches, and administrators indicated that the programs at Welcome Home served as a bridge between native cultures, immigrants and refugees experiences, and life in their new home. This transnational bridge took precedence over academic curricula, even though learning English and the other facets of American life were important. Welcome Home provided participants with a safe environment where they could learn what they needed for successful adjustment without sacrificing their native cultures or overlooking the experiences they had endured while escaping their native lands. Within the context of building a trusting relationship, participants shared personal troubles with staff and administrators. The stories they shared represented a small piece of their experiences. Untold stories included participants' traumatic experiences, such as scarcity of food and starvation, incidents of rape, unsanitary refugee shelters, diseases, kidnap raids by insurgent groups, and many more (see also Rawlence, 2016). Understanding a multitude of cultures, getting to know individual histories, helping participants set and prioritize goals, figuring out and working with strengths and skills they already had, and respecting their aspirations required a great deal of multicultural knowledge and sensitivity.

Rapport, Trust, and Fictive Kinship. Most participants reported that the parenting and family programs made them feel like they had found a family. A fictive kin (Stack, 1970, p. 58) relationship emerged from the process of establishing rapport and building trust throughout the parenting and family programs and was a key to successful goal-achievement. Participants emphasized that, in the absence of their immediate family members in close proximity, the program was like family. For example, a refugee from Northern Africa said that she arrived in Newhome in 2013 with only her husband and son, who was three-year-old at the time of the interview. She missed her parents and siblings. In her country of origin, she had been a teacher and her husband

a bank manager. At the time of the interview, she was a stay-at-home mother and her husband was working eight to 10 hours a day. She shared the story of her son, who attended the family program with her. She said,

In my country, we lived with a big family. When we came here he [her son] cried too much because it was just me and him at home. When I came in the [Family Class], the program helped me very much. It's another family for me and for the boy.

Similarly, a refugee from the Middle East shared that he and his wife spent three years in a country neighboring his homeland before resettling in Newhome where their first child was born. His family remained in his native country where his father later died. His wife was a stay-at-home mother. Like many participants in the family program, he said:

When I came to [Newhome] 8 years ago, starting here at [Welcome Home] helped me a lot. In my conversations with my wife, I say that it's like my mom [laughter]. Sometimes during a conversation, I tell my wife: "Go to your mom". I like it [Welcome Home]. I like this office as a whole because they help.

Like many other participants in the family program, an immigrant from Central America spoke of the emotional ties she shared with staff. She said,

The teacher is wonderful. All the time we meet, "Hello Carolina, how are you?" Last month my brother passed away in [Central America], and the teacher came to me to talk to me, "Are you okay? Do you need help?"... It helped me. They are truly my family.

Most of the immigrants and refugees who attended Welcome Home had very limited family support. The fictive kin relationship they built with teachers, staff, and administrators did not replace their families, but provided emotional support and referrals to needed resources. The sense of empowerment provided by the fictive kinship relationship with the agency was one of the reasons Welcome Home Community Center was so popular that participants were frequently put on a waiting list to be enrolled. Key to rapport, trust, and familial relationships was the multicultural transnational approach administrators, staff, and instructors brought to programs and interactions and the input participants had in goal-setting and program curricula.

Stability. Trends in participants' successful movement toward achieving their goals were related to stability in the process of their transnational adjustment to the United States. Families generally arrive and receive short-term support for basic human needs, including shelter, simple home furnishings, food, and medical care. This is commonly coupled with social support from volunteers and non-profit agencies. Immigrants and refugees are expected to adjust to their new lives within a matter of a few months, finding jobs, learning their way using public transportation, and becoming economically self-sufficient. Generally speaking, the goal of resettlement programs is to provide social and economic competence to immigrants and refugees to smoothly navigate through the self-sufficiency framework. From lower to upper levels of stability, Choitz and Flynn (2003) identified a five-stage bench-marked evaluation tool of "the Self-sufficiency and Declining Support Framework Model": "in-crisis" individuals/families are entirely dependent on others in almost every aspect; "at-risk" are vulnerable individuals/families that need continued community services support; a "stable" status indicates that individuals and families need community services' support from time to time; "self-sufficient" individuals/families no longer require agencies' support and can ideally move towards a "thriving" status.

Stability in terms of employment, housing, and the ability to meet basic needs appears to be related to goal

attainment. Lack of stability in participants' adjustment process usually affected their goal consistency as their efforts were scattered in other various activities, such as welfare assistance appointments, grocery shopping with limited English on a low-income budget, and searching for a job with little English and a lack of employment experience. For this reason, family coaches focused on working with families who were higher in the self-sufficiency model and who had achieved a basic level of stability. While it might appear to be more essential to help less stable families, Welcome Home recognized the importance of using its resources in ways that would most likely lead to goal attainment while referring families lower on the self-sufficiency scale to agencies that could provide them with housing, food, medical care, and other basic human needs. A family coach said,

Families that are in extreme crisis don't tend to do very well in the family coaching setting because they require a lot of more support than what coaching can offer. They need financial assistance in terms of housing, there is not very much that we can do in our program for that. What I usually do in that situation is refer them to a social service organization that can give them more comprehensive services. Sometimes even if they have passed their time limit with, say Catholic Charities or [State] Refugee Agency, if they have worked with those groups in the past I will call one of the case workers there and say "Hey, did you know that such and such is having a rough time; is there any way that you guys can help them out." More times than not they are already working with that person or they will be able to work something out.

Recognition that movement toward self-sufficiency is not always a linear process was essential in meeting families' needs and providing them with the stability they needed to take the next step. It was also key to managing the scarce resources Welcome Home had to work with.

Family-Centered Services. The level of stability in the process of immigrants' and refugees' adjustment was related to their primary role as parents. Upward mobility and goal attainment was rarely about individual achievement, but rather about enhancing the circumstances of the family. A family and parenting staff member observed,

The overarching goal is the whole family. Really what the Family and Parenting Programs seek to do is to help refugee and immigrant families remain intact because when families come to the United States they don't speak English as their first language. Usually it's the children who pick up that language first and they are often being utilized as interpreters for their parents. They are the ones reading the mail to decide what's worth keeping and what is not. They are the ones that, if there is an emergency in the home would be calling for help through 911 or other services. So, that creates imbalance in the family structure. So, I think the ultimate goal of Parenting and Family Classes is to help that balance remain where it was when they first got here. So, the parents are the parents, and the child is the child; and the parents understand and are educated about different roles that they can play as parents. Being an educator for their child will be one of those goals.

Helping parents learn to relate to and discipline their children in a foreign country, language, and culture was key to family stability. A refugee from the Middle East explained that parents' primary responsibility is to their children. He said,

The programs [in the Parenting Class] are about how you can maybe get a loan from the bank; buy a house or starting a business. Maybe you can get \$100,000 in your bank account, but it's less important than when your children do drugs or bad things, such as becoming thieves. You need to build the children first. If I have a million dollars in the bank and my children have no good character, it's nothing.

Increasing participants' levels of English proficiency moves people to greater employability. Higher levels of English also supported their self-reliance such as in shaping their personal narrative without recourse to interpreters and constituted a form of empowerment. As their English proficiency gradually increased,

participants in the parenting class reported that they were more comfortable communicating with their children's teachers, understanding the school system, and how to access community resources and services. Parenting and family programs helped parents advance their own potential and their children's education. The family program allowed people to have control over what they wanted to achieve and let them to keep their transnational ethnicity while finding ways to be part of the U.S. society. The idea was more about bridging cultural gaps than straightforwardly switching parents' transnational cultural competence to the United States.

Regular Attendance. Goal attainment was related to regular attendance and indicated a level of commitment to administrators, instructors, and staff. Prior to the year we observed the agency did not have a strong attendance policy. Administrators indicated that progress toward achieving goals was not as strong as they were in 2015-2016 because there were no consequences for missing. Welcome Home records indicated that only three participants were unable to finish the program for reasons beyond their control. A participant from Southeast Asia with two elementary school-age children highlighted that attendance was positively associated with results. She said,

I come regularly (2015-2016) to the program because I like it. When I enrolled for the first time (2013-2014), I did not understand English and I did not want to come regularly. In the past, I would sometimes come to class once or twice a week because I did not understand the teacher. Now, I understand better and I go to class to learn more.

In-depth interviews with various participants showed that participants believed that they remained on the right track throughout the program because regular attendance was required.

Conclusion: Discussions of Key Findings

This study suggests that allowing immigrants and refugees to set their own goals while providing supportive programs and coaching is a viable way to allow people to retain aspects of their native cultures while adapting to the cultural, structural, and legal mandates of the host country. Our work contributes to the literature by demonstrating that a multicultural transnational approach can result in high success rates.

Transnational theorists argue against an oversimplification of bonding co-ethnic ties and bridging transnational differences that assumes homogeneity of social ties among immigrants and refugees from diverse backgrounds (Avenarius, 2012; Toma & Vause, 2014). From this perspective, our research suggests that immigrants and refugees from a wide range of native countries go through a complex process to establish a multicultural identity and bridge their transnational differences. As parents, participants relied on ethnic ties, if any, and at the same time negotiated some level of bridging those resources with those provided by Welcome Home staff and their referrals.

Most of immigrant and refugees in the parenting and family programs had lived in a "no-man's land" for decades, spending time fleeing from one country to the next and spending years in refugee camps. They were transnational groups in the sense that their identities were largely formed during displacement and that they were between their native cultures, that of refugee camps, and that of the host country. Their homelands were no longer home and their host country was not yet home.

Welcome Home's major strength was its clarity about taking a multicultural transnational approach to assisting participants in setting and achieving their goals. During the time of our research, administrators, teachers, and staff repeatedly emphasized the need for respect for participants' traditional cultures and their experiences before arriving in the United States. Developing a trusting relationship characterized by a fictive kinship relationship was key to getting participants to open up to them about their desires, fears, and any

problems they were encountering in moving toward their goals. Remaining flexible when new goals arose or stated goals were no longer feasible, even in course curricula, also contributed to the agency's overall success, as did providing a stable arena in which participants could learn to cope with their frequently unstable lives and social situations. Staff occasionally struggled to understand and accept decisions made by participants, but the agency's ethic of respect ensured that participants remained in charge of their goals and progress.

Our goal in this research was to evaluate a specific form of programming in a unique immigrant and refugee resettlement organization, one that is not constrained by the dictates of funding sources. Unlike many other agencies, Welcome Home did not design resettlement curricula based on demographic differences, such as ethnicity, language, nationality, gender, and/or religion. By using a mixed group method of immigrants and refugees from all over the world in their programming, Welcome Home hoped to create a social network of internationals and new relationships creating a safety net among the refugee community that they served.

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Appendix 1

Wheel of Life

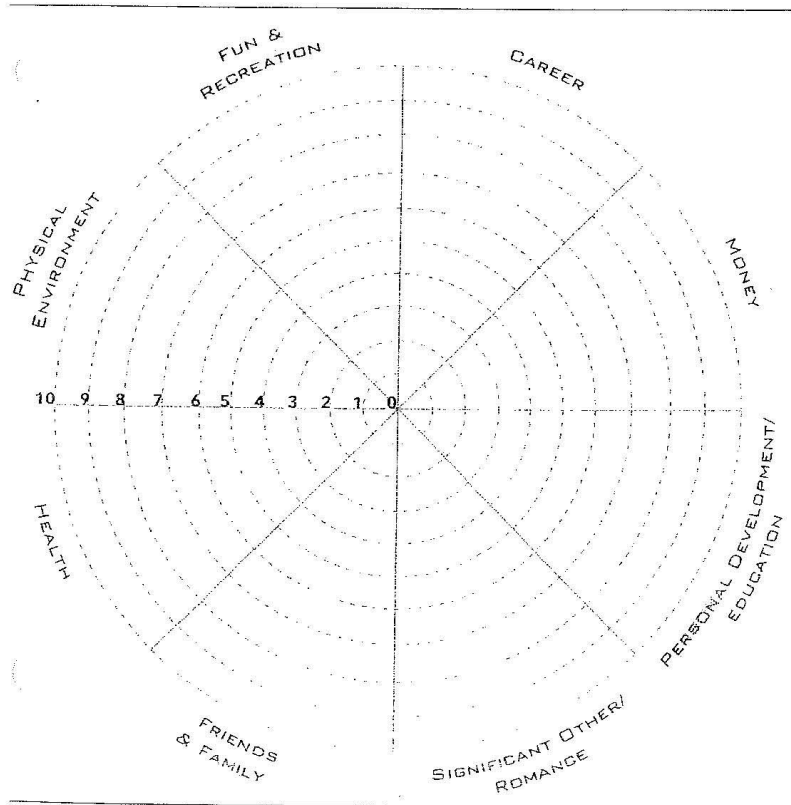
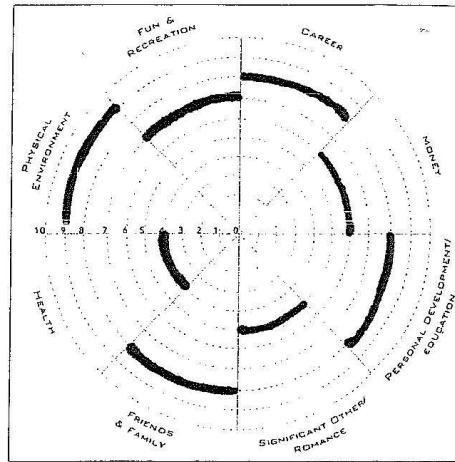
Instructions: Seeing the center of the wheel as 0 and the outer edges as 10, fill in your level of satisfaction with each area of your life by drawing a curved line to create a new outer edge. (1 = not satisfied; 10 = very satisfied)

The eight sections in the Wheel of Life represent balance.

The perimeter represents your Wheel of Life.

If this were a real wheel how bumpy would the ride be?

EXAMPLE:



Questions:

- What area on the wheel are you most wanting and willing to make a difference with?
- What is the current state of this area in your life?
- What is missing or not working for you in this area?
- What would you like to create in this area?