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A Welcoming State: Examining Refugee Outreach Efforts of Utah's Department of Public Safety

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Table of Contents

Introduction....1

Key Findings....1

Background....2

Utah's Law Enforcement Refugee Outreach Program....3

Methodology....4

Community Feedback and Recommendations for Law Enforcement Outreach....4

Conclusion....6

References....7

Appendix A: Interview Questions....7

Introduction

Approximately 1,200 refugees find their way to Utah every year, adding to the nearly 60,000 already residing in the state. There are roughly seventy refugee-specific service providers, and hundreds of other programs include people with refugee status in their scope of services. While these organizations and programs exist to help families with refugee status settle in with housing, employment and language services, navigating or understanding a new society and culture can be challenging. This adjustment includes learning new laws and the institution that defends them.

Often, refugees come from countries where police are corrupt and punitive, leading to distrust and fear of law enforcement in their new country. The current political rhetoric as well as unfamiliarity of U.S. law have led to misunderstandings on behalf of both law enforcement and the individual with refugee status; misunderstandings that can lead to arrest.

Amid concern surrounding recent terrorist activity on United States soil, Utah's Governor Gary Herbert sought assurance from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) regarding Utah's refugee vetting process. While confident in the state's vetting procedures, the Department of Safety discovered an opportunity to engage with the refugee community. A refugee outreach agent position was created, held by a police officer and designed to build and foster relationships among law enforcement and refugee communities. The Department of Public Safety is currently looking to expand their outreach efforts by training additional police officers in cultural competency and implicit biases, and to learn the training necessary to teach refugee community leaders about U.S. rights and laws so these leaders can then be experts for their own communities.

This project used an exploratory approach to determine the reception of the current and planned outreach efforts of law enforcement. By interviewing key members of both the law enforcement and refugee communities, feedback, needs gaps and recommendations were obtained.

Key Findings

Collaboration: In order for an outreach effort to be successful, it has to include collaboration from the community with which it seeks to build relationships. This ensures specific needs are met and cultural barriers are adequately addressed. The collaboration effort on behalf of DPS is notable, yet some entities interviewed had been involved in the past, and have not seen that relationship continue.

Children adjust to new society more rapidly than parents: By enrolling in school, children with refugee status are exposed to their new society every day, and generally adjust to societal norms and learn the language quicker than their parents. This means children often become the interpreter, and some take advantage of the privilege and undermine their parent's authority. Additionally, their peers are often believed over their

parents or community leaders, making frequent interaction with law enforcement and caseworkers important to dispel rumors and myths.

Misinformation about Law Enforcement: Misinformation about law enforcement can result in an individual with refugee status not seeking help when needed, or seeking help from law enforcement when another agency might be necessary. Misinformation can also lead to fear of law enforcement, which in some cases results in isolationism and a lesser ability to thrive in a new environment. All of these factors can have an effect on one's safety and that of their community. Misinformation can be addressed by law enforcement engaging with the refugee community, and all interviewed believed that recent and planned law enforcement outreach efforts will establish an infrastructure that will result in a more informed and safe refugee community.

Misinformation about Refugees: In some cultures, not making eye contact is a sign of deference, but police officers in the U.S. might interpret that behavior as suspicious. In the Philippines, police have the authority to stop and harass at will, therefore it is customary to avoid police if noticed on the street. Actively avoiding police in the U.S. would also be interpreted as suspicious. These clashes of culture coupled with the current political atmosphere make it important for police officers to receive cultural sensitivity training, and necessary for those who have resettled in the U.S. to understand police expectations.

Translation and Interpretation Procedures: The process of finding an interpreter for those in need of law enforcement can be streamlined. Often, the wait for an interpreter can delay needed help. The Boise Police Department, whose own program inspired DPS outreach efforts, has hired on-call interpreters that are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These interpreters are often hired from within the refugee communities themselves.

Importance of Clarity in Refugee Trainings: In some African cultures, it is common to communicate certain ideas through metaphor, or a relatable story, in order to accurately convey the meaning behind a concept. Due to the many different methods of communicating around the world, it is important that any training for refugees use the simplest language, and encourages verification of understanding to ensure correct interpretation.

Background

According to United States Code, a refugee is any person outside of the U.S. that is of special humanitarian concern and "has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (8 U.S. Code § 1101). The United States admitted just under 85,000 refugees in fiscal year 2016, an upward trend following a dip in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 (Igielnick, & Krogstad, 2017).

Approximately 1,200 refugees resettle in Utah every year, adding to the nearly 60,000 already residing in the state as of 2016. The vast majority settle in the Salt Lake Valley and represent countries such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Iraq, Vietnam, the former Soviet Union and Burma, among others (Utah Refugee Services Office, 2016).

With the safety of resettling in a new country comes the stress of resettling in an unfamiliar place, most likely with a different language, social customs and institutions. Social institutions stem from societal norms and common expectations, and can include a majority religion, education and government (North, 1990). While organizations and programs exist to help families with refugee status settle into their new country with housing, employment and language services, navigating or understanding new social institutions can be overwhelming. Additionally, long-term case work was just recently implemented in Utah, meaning that many established refugee families have navigated these institutions on their own, or remain unaware of the many opportunities available to them (M. Christensen, personal communication, Feb 10, 2017). For example, some families may learn too late that it is possible for their child to go to school, while others may be unaware they shouldn't hunt the duck in their neighborhood park pond for dinner (M. Christensen, personal communication, Feb 2, 2017). In this vein, learning the nuances of a new culture can be at best awkward, and at worst unsafe, as a lack of understanding can mean unnecessary clashes with a foundational institution of government, the law.

More so than other societal institutions, misunderstanding the law can result in serious consequences. For example, in some countries it is customary to barter with police or offer bribes to settle differences (Pring, 2015). If that behavior were attempted with police officers in the United States, it could lead to arrest as it is against the law (18 USCS prec § 216). Some countries expect women to defer to their husbands as a matter of religious law. If they fail to submit to their husband's authority, they can face physically violent repercussions (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). Where in those countries domestic violence is normalized, it is against the law in the United States (P.L. 103-322, 108 Stat. 1902).

Another major cultural difference can be parenting methods. Parents with refugee status are often nervous about U.S. laws against child abuse, as physical punishment may be a reliable parenting tool. Additionally, children often become privy to these laws and use them as a tool of parental manipulation, resulting in parents feeling powerless in their own homes, and fearful of law enforcement (M. Christensen, personal communication, Feb 2, 2017; Feb 10, 2017). Lastly, another major cultural hurdle is learned distrust of law enforcement due to negative experiences with law enforcement in their home country, where the role of police is that of punisher, not protector (Weiner, 1998).

These clashes of culture have led to misunderstandings and arrests of refugees settling in new countries (Carlson, 2002). This is particularly important when considering that the United States has experienced several mass shootings in the name of Islamic terrorism in the recent past (Lister, et. al, 2017), resulting in growing fear, distrust and denigration of people fleeing unrest in Middle Eastern countries to the United States (Lee, et. al, 2013). This fear became a major talking point during the presidential election of 2016, culminating in a call for banning all Muslim immigrants (Johnson, 2016). These campaign promises bore fruit in 2017 with executive orders to limit immigration and acceptance of refugees from seven, and later reduced to six prominently Muslim countries (Zapotosky, Nakamura, & Hauslohner, 2017). This rhetoric, and it is labeled as such due to the lack of evidence that the countries targeted are more likely than others to harbor terrorists (Nowrasteh, 2016), has led to increased hate crimes (Reuters, 2017) and may add to bias already established among law enforcement officers post-9/11 whether they are aware of it or not (Dubosh, 2015). This potential bias makes it even more crucial for people with refugee status to understand their new country's norms and laws, and for law enforcement to understand the different cultures refugees represent.

Utah's Law Enforcement Refugee Outreach Program

In Utah, there are roughly seventy refugee-specific programs offered by various service providers, while hundreds of other programs include refugees in their scope of services (Utah Nonprofits Association, 2015). Immediate resettlement and ongoing case management services are offered by non-profits such as the International Rescue Committee, Catholic Community Services and the Asian Association of Utah's Refugee and Immigrant Center. The state of Utah established the Refugee Services Office under the Department of Workforce Services to offer education and community opportunities. Some municipalities have created their own programs to support immigrants and refugees, notably South Salt Lake's Promise program, which has established nine community centers, family liaisons, after school programs and interpretation services. These programs help to make Utah a welcoming place as they strive to ease the stress of resettlement in a new and unfamiliar place. However, while specific police departments have found it necessary to closely engage their sizable refugee communities to ensure the safety of their precincts, a statewide effort on behalf of law enforcement has only recently been established.

Despite the political climate and concerns surrounding terrorism worldwide, Utah Governor Gary Herbert has been working with national security officials to familiarize himself with the United States refugee vetting process (Jordan, 2016). Furthermore, in November of 2015 he directed the Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) to conduct a review of security procedures related to refugee resettlement in Utah. This process led to a partnership between Utah Refugee Services Office (RSO) and DPS, and, inspired by the success of the Boise Police Department's refugee outreach efforts, created a similar program that seeks to build trust and communication between law enforcement and refugee communities. DPS created a "Refugee Outreach Agent" position to be held by a public safety officer. This position's key objective is to build and foster relationships with individuals and families with refugee status. The anticipated outcome is to normalize relationships with law enforcement for those who may have feared law enforcement in their home country; which will build trust and knowledge of the system, and thus safer communities.

In addition to taking a welcoming seat at the table of refugee community groups and service providers throughout the valley, the Refugee Outreach Agent began teaching the United States rights and laws section of the day-long orientation every newly arrived refugee attends, offered by both the Salt Lake City International Rescue Committee and Catholic Community Services of Utah. This section covers a citizen's rights, Unites States government infrastructure, the criminal justice system and basics of encountering police. This agent used past experience with cultural misunderstandings to enhance the training regarding frequent confusion about laws and police. Additionally, the agent serves as a point-of-contact for both newly-arrived refugees and their service providers, a relationship that didn't previously exist.

According to Refugee Services Office, between February 2016 and November 2016, the refugee outreach efforts of the Department of Public Safety resulted in:

- 1,026 refugee contacts
- 34 U.S. law cultural orientations at Catholic Community Services and International Rescue Committee
- 4 youth dialogue presentations at local high schools
- 8 community civic dialogues
- 2,000+ additional refugee contacts at community events
- 3 local law enforcement coordination meetings
- 5 cases opened or referred to local law enforcement of potential refugee victimization
- Program development for Countering Violent Extremism, in partnership with the Islamic Society of Greater Salt Lake
- Training program development for refugee leaders and police, in partnership with Refugee Services Office and refugee community leaders
- Development of training videos for law enforcement, in partnership with Refugee Services Office

(Utah Refugee Services Office, 2016)

While critical for newly arrived refugees to learn, DPS acknowledged many refugees already established in Utah lack understanding of the institution of law enforcement. Therefore, by utilizing the partnerships with refugee communities and the agencies that serve them, DPS is expanding their outreach efforts by developing a curriculum that will train additional law enforcement agents to teach the U.S. rights and laws curriculum to refugee community leaders in their own precinct. This training will also include cultural sensitivity and implicit bias training for law enforcement officers, which will familiarize them with the cultural differences that exist between themselves and individuals from other cultures.

The ultimate goal of this "train the trainer" program is to establish trusted experts in communities. This will ensure that those who have not had much experience with law enforcement, and are perhaps timid about such encounters, will not only be able to ask important questions in their own language, but to also feel safe asking questions.

According to the curriculum, several basic assumptions will be stressed to the law enforcement officers receiving the training: 1) people with refugee status often do not know the laws or their rights when encountering law enforcement; 2) because of abuse and persecution in their home country by corrupt police and others in uniform, they have good reason to distrust and fear law enforcement in the United States; 3) parents with refugee status often believe that U.S. law is "stacked against" them in favor of children (in situations of perceived child abuse); 4) men with refugee status often believe that U.S. law is "stacked against" them in favor of women when there are allegations of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Methodology

This project examined recent outreach efforts of the Utah Department of Public Safety towards refugee communities to assess its success and determine possible improvements. This was accomplished through semi-structured interviews that solicited feedback from both law enforcement and refugee communities. Interviews were conducted with four law enforcement officers and three individuals representing both the refugee community and refugee service providers. Those interviewed were given details of current outreach efforts as well as the planned "train-the-trainer" curriculum, paying particular attention to the assumptions listed above. Questions and probes focused on insights regarding DPS training and outreach, and additional questions were asked to gain further insight on feedback provided. Foundational questions are provided in Appendix A. Those who provided feedback were:

Law Enforcement:

- A sergeant from a local city police department that serves one of the largest refugee populations in the state.
- An officer from the same police department above. Because of this large refugee population, informal outreach efforts began over fifteen years ago, and their insights have been crucial to the development of the state-wide effort. Due to their outreach efforts in their own community, crime rates have dropped significantly. They credit their success to establishing relationships and conducting trainings with refugee community groups.
- The Department of Public Safety's Refugee Outreach Agent, who was able to provide an inside perspective and specifics of this recent outreach effort.
- Refugee Liaison at the Boise Police Department, the position of which the Utah effort was based. The Boise program was established over 10 years ago; experience that provides context for Utah's efforts.

Refugee Community:

- The Director of a community program that was developed to oversee the needs of the large refugee population from the city described above. This program ensures their adjustment to a new society is successful; including nine community centers, language services and after school programs.
- The Family Liaison Coordinator of the same community program.
- The Casework Program Manager for one of the main refugee resettlement agencies that works closely with the state's Refugee Outreach Agent.

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed into common feedback themes, and organized into the community recommendations below. These themes include recommendations for police officers, recommendations for training refugees, recommendations for interpretation procedures, and recommendations for building community relationships.

Community Feedback and Recommendations for Law Enforcement Outreach

For Police Officers:

Groups from both sectors believe it important that all officers receive more training regarding people with refugee status.

Expand training to all officers. Extend the scope of the "Train the Trainer" to teach the cultural sensitivity section to officers in the trainer's department. Departmental training time constraints were acknowledged, and it was suggested that one department host the training, and invite representatives from other departments to attend. If other officers learned the basics of the US Rights and Laws curriculum as well, information will better trickle into the community.

Awareness of refugees outside Salt Lake County. Raise awareness of refugees in precincts outside the Salt Lake Valley, specif-

ically regarding refugees' legal status. There have been reports of police assuming illegal citizenship status of refugees because they do not speak English.

Extended case management is showing early signs of success. It is important to understand that extended case management is a recent development. Refugees that have lived in Utah for years may still not speak English because they only received case management for 6 months; enough time to cover basics like vaccinations, school enrollment, and housing and employment services. It has only been a few years that case management covers up to five years, a responsibility shared by multiple service providers.

Encourage trust by exercising patience. Representatives from the city that serves a large refugee population stressed they have learned to use caution and benefit-of-the-doubt in most house calls concerning refugees. While the call may not be a police matter, it is important not to discourage trust in law enforcement. The curriculum can better address emergency and non-emergency phone numbers for law enforcement, as well as what instances require contacting a case worker instead.

Maintain contact. Frequently attend refugee community programs and events, which is very effective in establishing trust between law enforcement and community. This normalizes the citizen-police relationship, and creates an environment that allows individuals with refugee status a safe space to communicate concerns.

For Refugee Training:

Revisit topics. Due to the amount of information received at orientation, crucial details about refugees' rights and US laws might not be absorbed. The community leader "expert" will definitely aid this concern, but it is urged that law enforcement regularly interact with and attend community meetings to revisit basics and answer questions. One reason given is they may need to be reminded what their rights are, especially in the recent political climate. Another reason is peers at school are often believed over community leaders, but police officers are believed over peers. This will help both dispel rumors and establish relationships.

Clear up confusion. Be sure to include ample time for questions and discussion after a training, as there is a lot of misinformation passed around refugee communities. Misinformation can stem from rumors heard at school or around the neighborhood. Language barriers and distrust of law enforcement can exacerbate the issue and cause unnecessary stress. Police officers have found that if they leave time at the end of a meeting or training for questions, there are usually a lot of them. This dialogue also aides in creating a rapport, and ultimately, trust.

Examples aid understanding. Include real examples of police encounters and common discrepancies of cultural laws in training. Examples of police encounters help illustrate the context of a situation in how it relates to the law; why or how a behavior led to a particular outcome. Demonstrating common law discrepancies allow the trainer to discuss why certain behaviors might be legal in their country of origin but not the U.S.

Simple wording. When developing the curriculum, use as simple wording as possible to avoid important facts being lost in translation. When in doubt, ask the interpreter to repeat back what was said to ensure correct translation and fundamental understanding.

Clear about consequences. Be clear on consequences of crimes discussed, as well as when it is appropriate to call the police, both the emergency and non-emergency numbers.

Translated FAQ. Create a Frequently Asked Questions pamphlet covering the topics of the orientation (rights, laws and interactions with police) translated into multiple languages. Newly arrived refugees learn a lot of information in a short amount of time. A FAQ pamphlet would allow them to revisit the topic when needed. It would also be helpful for long-time residents who might need a refresher, or as a hand out when attending community meetings.

Interpretation and Translation

Language barriers between individuals with refugee status and law enforcement were a major concern among all parties.

Deficient Translation Services. There is concern about the translation services offered when police or 911 are called. Often it is deficient and stalls aid. Additionally, ensure an interpreter is provided in domestic disputes to maintain neutrality. In one case, the perpetrator, who spoke English, was used as the interpreter and manipulated the situation.

Create Information Cards. Create cards refugees can hand to law enforcement that say: "I am a refugee from _____. I do not speak English; I speak_____."

Parents in particular need law-enforcement partnership. Refugee children learn English and socialize earlier than their parents. A major concern is that children have used these skills to manipulate their parents. It is important for law enforcement to build a rapport with and act as a resource for parents, who will then be more comfortable going to them for help, rather than afraid of what they might do.

Confusion regarding interpreter protocol. There is confusion among service providers as to what the protocol is when a police officer arrives at a home where no one speaks English. Is the state required to provide an interpreter? It would be beneficial for the community to have clarity on what to expect.

Building Community Relationships

Outreach Agent has created a welcoming atmosphere. Having a police officer teach the US rights and laws section of orientation helps new arrivals feel less scared; refugees learn police are here to help them, learn consequences of behaviors, and it helps to clear up rumors or confusion as they often have a lot of questions.

Outreach Agent means effective assistance. Having a police officer as a liaison is very helpful, as before it was harder to receive help from the police. It was common to get sent from department to department, and now they are helped right away. This has prevented and solved many issues.

Build relationships with case workers. Much success has been found by establishing reciprocal relationships between family liaisons or caseworkers and law enforcement. Law enforcement will often call a liaison when they believe a family could use additional services. Family liaisons reach out to law enforcement when there is a problem beyond their control. In both situations, individuals and families with refugee status receive optimal support.

Build relationships with youth. Success has been found by fostering relationships with refugee youth as a crime prevention measure. This can be accomplished by having fun and stepping outside of the "enforcement" role. A relationship with youth provides a sense of protection in that they may be more likely to ask for help. It also allows the opportunity to act as a role model for those that might need one.

Conclusion

All individuals interviewed related their enthusiasm for the outreach efforts of DPS to the refugee community of Utah and the objectives behind the program. Likewise, all insisted police officers could be more understanding and respectful of different cultures. A better understanding leads to reciprocal relationships and mutual trust. The recommendations offered by the community address specific concerns they've observed, and will help outreach efforts be more effective. With this in mind, the planned "train the trainer" program will be essential in fostering a more welcoming and safe atmosphere in the state of Utah.

Future research needs include examining the effectiveness of local police officers receiving implicit bias training; examining the implementation and effectiveness of the expanded DPS "Train the Trainer" outreach program; comparing the effects of long-term case management (up to five years) and short-term (six months); examining the effect on refugee communities in states with extensive government outreach programs (e.g. Idaho), compared to states with non-existent government outreach (e.g. Texas, where all government programs geared towards refugee resettlement have been eliminated).

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Have you had any involvement in the outreach efforts or creation of this training curriculum?

-If so, what has the experience been like?

Have the outreach efforts of DPS made a difference? In what ways?

-Have you noticed a difference, seen relationships change, or heard of second hand accounts?

In what ways did the laws section of the orientation change with a law enforcement officer teaching?

Based on the particular needs of your community, could anything be added to the new training curriculum? Could anything be added to orientation? Do you think there are other issues not being addressed?

Are there additional ways law enforcement could engage the refugee community?

What is the interpretation process when police are called to a house that doesn't speak English?

What are you concerns, if any, about how recent events will affect the communities you work with?

Besides the resettlement agencies, who else is involved in informing the curriculum?

Will you give those officers trained to teach their refugee community leader's freedom to add to it, to personalize it for their community's needs?

Do you have any words of wisdom for the Utah DPS outreach program? Any lessons learned along the way?

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