Bridging the Gap in Services for Refugees with Disabilities in the U.S.:

Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities

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Background

- Refugees with disabilities face significant challenges, such as unfamiliarity with local resources, language differences, and cultural diversity when accessing social and healthcare services (Mirza, 2011)
- According to Mirza, 2011, refugees with disabilities are historically vulnerable and are subject to violence, discrimination, and abuse
- Refugees depend on service providers to provide them with culturally competent care (Mirza et al., 2014)

Objectives:

The purpose of this initiative is to increase awareness of social and healthcare practitioners on the needs of refugees with disabilities

- Reduce the waiting time of refugees with disabilities when accessing services
- 2. Increase cultural awareness and the unique needs of this invisible group
- 3. Using language access plans and cultural broker to understand the needs and challenges of this group
- 4. Empowering refugees with disabilities to integrate and acclimate to our environment easily

Methods or Description of the Program

- Contacted five refugee resettlement agencies in Alabama, West Virginia, Texas, and Illinois to understand their experience with refugees with disabilities and noticed that there is a disconnection between social/ healthcare services and refugee agencies, which prevents refugees from equally accessing resources
- Utilized my experience as a refugee with disabilities and my unique position as a LEND trainee to initiate a discussion with different entities to bridge services for this forgotten group
- Initiated a collaboration between the refugee resettlement office and the Center for Excellence in Disabilities

Questions I asked before starting this research:

- . What are the barriers to accessing resources for refugees with disabilities?
- 2. What types of services are important during the early period?
- 3. Are service providers aware of the needs of refugees with disabilities, and what step is necessary to increase the knowledge of service providers?

Findings/Results

- The majority of refugees with disabilities are not aware that service providers are obligated to provide an interpreter
- Early-stage of resettlement is the crucial time, which determines the success of refugees with disabilities. However, some agencies workers have serious fear nowadays, "I expect to see future refugees having a more difficult time of resettlement with fewer services. The disabled, especially singles, will find it harder"
- Neither social services are familiar with refugees' need nor resettlement agencies are familiar with local disability services. Care is effective if it is provided in a timely manner and specific to the needs of the patients (Mirza, 2011)
- Trauma-inform care is necessary when assisting refugees with disabilities (Blankenship & Madson, 2007).
- The U.S. rate of service delivery is not increasing quickly enough to accommodate the rapid changes in the refugee population (Griswold, et al., 2018).

Conclusions

- Service organizations should modify their programs to effectively meet the health, education, and social service needs (Mirza, & Heinemann, 2012)
- It's crucial for disability services to build a relationship with the resettlement agency to bridge the gap and help refugees with disabilities access services easily (Mirza, & Heinemann, 2012)
- It is difficult for refugees with disabilities to navigate our public system as they have too many obstacles to overcome
- To effectively serve refugees, its crucial to reduce the timeline of refugees accessing services (Szczepura, 2005)
- Implement relevant policies to ensure linguistic, cultural competence, and frequent outreach efforts (Zeleke, Hughes, & Drozda, 2019)

A specialized resource is developed for refugees with disabilities by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants:

Resource Guide for Serving Refugees with Disabilities (Blankenship & Madson,

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