**Sexual assault prevention programs for teens resettled in the US as refugees**

**Client description**

The mission of the Sexual Assault Resource Agency (SARA) is to eliminate sexual violence and its impact by providing education, advocacy, and support to women, men, and children. Our vision is a community free from sexual violence. Our staff of 13 on-site staff, along with our weekend Emergency Advocates, provides trauma-informed advocacy and therapy for hundreds of survivors of sexual assault each year, along with accompaniment to the emergency room, a 24-hour hotline, and prevention programming for Charlottesville, Albemarle, Louisa, Greene, Nelson, and Fluvanna.

The program presently seeking support is our Prevention Program. Implemented by a small staff of three, our Prevention Program has reached nearly 16,000 people in the past 2 years. These are primarily high school and middle school students, receiving multi-session curricula in classrooms. However, this also includes teacher training, at-risk group education, peer activist groups, fatherhood groups in the local jail, workshops at churches, consulting with community-based institutions, and a range of other services. More information can be found at http://saracville.org .

**Problem definition**

We are beginning a process of review that focuses on populations that lack access to our services. One under-served population is refugees in our service area.

Our question is: What are the best practices when providing sexual assault prevention for a refugee community – particularly teen refugees – in the United States?

Particularly, because so many of them have already come through so much violence and trauma already in their lives, how do we provide appropriate prevention training for them? What are their particular needs, and how can we leverage their particular strengths in efforts to prevent violence in their homes and futures?

This is in addition to each group of refugees coming from extremely different cultures in various places around the world. There is also the challenge for refugee teens who are acclimating to and growing up in US culture while at the same time having parents who may want to reinforce a very different (i.e. their native) culture.

**Background of the problem**

This issue is relevant because we do have some contact with this community, and understand that there is a real need to incorporate refugees into our broader community-wide effort to decrease incidents of sexual assault and abuse. While we have provided one-time classroom workshops for ESL/ELL classes at one local high school, we often find that our training and resources are limiting what we can provide for students in our community who have experience as refugees.

A challenge is that much of our prevention programs involve addressing the root causes of sexual assault in US culture. So when we work with pre-teens, our focus is on precursor behaviors, like sexual harassment, boundaries, and consent, which in some ways may seem too basic for some students who have experienced more severe and physical forms of violence. We do address harassment from a human rights standpoint, so it is possible that our first lesson could be delivered differently, or that there is a human rights based training that would better serve teens who already have the experience of being refugees, and the violence and trauma that often is involved in their journeys so far. Ultimately, our hope with students who arrived as refugees is to partner with them as they acclimate to US culture, and help them challenge unhealthy norms (like acceptance of sexual harassment) they may be picking up from American-born peers as they adopt more and more cultural practices in their new home. But we are looking for what the best practices are, based on what others have done to support students like ours.

Another possibility is focusing on bystanders and inviting them to connect with experiences when others intervened to help them when they were in danger, or when they have intervened for others who are in danger. In other populations we work with who have experienced a lot of trauma (group homes, juvenile detention centers), we find that these students have amazing stories about how they have protected loved ones from violence, which launches meaningful conversations about how we intervene when we are bystanders to a high-risk situation involving sexual violence.

We are aware of another organization like us providing some services through the IRC, and plan to reach out to them as well as the IRC to help identify needs and solutions.

Ultimately we are hoping to find best practices to help prevent sexual violence in the lives of US teen refugees.

**Specific tasks**

We are really hoping for a literature review, and help searching for resources that others have used effectively in other localities. A report that also outlines the range of refugee communities in our region, and suggested resources for those communities, would be very helpful. This will allow us to identify capacity issues and begin to problem-solve how to better serve our community.

**Data availability**

We are able to provide a variety of resources related to best practices when providing prevention services to US-born Americans. These may be useful to launch your research into what is best for Americans who arrived as refugees. However, it is also possible that the needs are different enough that these resources may prove to be less useful than expected.

**Contact Information**

Laurie Jean Seaman, Director of Prevention

[prevention@saracville.org](mailto:prevention@saracville.org)

434-295-7273 x125