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Building Community in Refugee Youth Mentoring Programs at Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees

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BUILDING COMMUNITY IN REFUGEE YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAMS AT
PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ADVANCEMENT AND IMMERSION OF REFUGEES

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PIM 70

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Capstone Seminar May 7, 2018

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COMMUNITY IN REFUGEE YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAMS

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COMMUNITY IN REFUGEE YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Building community in youth programs is a necessary and effective way to support the human developmental needs of refugee and immigrant youth by way of facilitating cultural integration. The intentional processes of building community in the after school mentoring programs for refugee and immigrant high school students at Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees (PAIR) in Houston, Texas are essential to the program's overall success and mission fulfillment. Specific methodologies of building community include activities such as icebreakers, name games, teambuilders, and unstructured relationship building time. Crucial factors that a facilitator should be cognizant of when implementing community building strategies in PAIR programs, are: What to expect in the stages of group development and minimizing the potential disruptiveness of integrating new students, the barriers to cultural integration refugee youth face, patriarchal values inherent in many refugees' cultures due to war time exacerbation that starkly contrasts community building theory and practices, and the logistical challenges and derailment of community building efforts of PAIR staff due to lack of organizational support. Additionally, to serve as also a practical guide for similar program structures serving similar populations, the methods of addressing these factors are discussed, including previous successful implementation of community building tactics in PAIR programming.

Introduction

The role I serve at my practicum site, Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees (PAIR), involves the design and implementation of after school educational mentoring programs for eighty-seven refugee and immigrant students, from twenty-seven countries, who speak over twenty-one different languages (see Appendices A, B, & C). Building and maintaining a sense of community in PAIR after school programming is essential for high quality, impactful programs. Student retention and recruitment are ongoing goals, as refugees arrive throughout the year¹. There are many complex obstacles faced in building community in any youth program, let alone a youth program for refugee and immigrant youth attending low income schools that lack the resources to meet their unique and diverse needs². It has taken persistent and repetitive community-building strategies over time to intentionally create a strong sense of community that endures while simultaneously absorbing new members without deteriorating. This capstone will define community building, its methodologies, and necessity in PAIR programs, address the prominent challenges to be considered while building community in PAIR programs, and will conclude with practical methods of implementing community building strategies in PAIR programs.

The prominent challenges in implementing community building strategies discussed in this capstone will encompass the stages of group development in PAIR programs, the barriers to cultural integration refugee and immigrant youth face, the patriarchal values inherent in many

¹ At current time, the number arriving throughout the year has drastically changed. The Trump administration has severely lowered the cap of refugees allowed to resettle in the United States in 2018 by more than half the limit set by the Obama administration, and the lowest number since 1980 (Rosenberg, 2018).

² PAIR currently serves students in Title I funded public schools. "Title I provides financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families" (United States of Department of Education, 1996).

refugee and immigrant cultures, and the logistical challenges faced by PAIR staff implementing community building strategies.

Through the three and a half years I have been working at PAIR, I have faced difficulty in finding resources that fit my students and their diverse needs without heavy adaptation and creativity. It is hoped that the methods and strategies presented in this capstone paper can serve as a resource for similar programs aimed at serving and empowering refugee and immigrant youth.

Partnership for the Advancement and Immersion of Refugees (PAIR)

PAIR is a nonprofit organization based in Houston, Texas that consists of four full-time and four part-time staff members. The organization has been serving refugee youth in southwest Houston for the past eleven years, and is relatively well established. PAIR's mission, by means of educational mentoring programs, is to "empower refugee youth to navigate American society, reach their academic potential, and become community leaders" ("PAIR Houston Website", 2010). As a program manager of the after school high school programs, I facilitate twice weekly, two-hour sessions with the assistance of one part-time staff member. The sessions, administered at two high schools throughout the academic year, are designed to support students' social and emotional wellbeing and academic aspirations. Volunteers, typically local college students, sign up to be mentors on a semester basis, committing to attend a specific session once a week for ten weeks.

From 2010 through 2014, the United States alone resettled over seventy percent of the refugees accepted to the United Nations resettlement program. During that time, Houston, Texas resettled more refugees than any other city in the United States. In fact, if the greater Houston

area was considered a country, as of 2015 it would have ranked fourth in the world for refugee resettlement (Kragie, 2015). When refugee families arrive they are the in the care of overburdened and under resourced case managers at resettlement agencies. The bulk of refugee resettlement agencies services are focused on the needs of adults (Sanchez, 2016). PAIR was created to specifically address the needs of refugee youth.

Community

“Sense of Community”, as pertaining to youth, is the “feeling that one is part of a readily available, supportive, and dependable structure” (Evans, 2007, p. 695). According to Evans (2007), youth are often unprepared to be active citizens in their communities, especially so for minority groups like refugees. Correspondingly, “the core of PAIR's efforts is the resolution to bridge the educational gap and foster economic mobility” (“PAIR Houston Website”, 2010). More so, research has shown that youth who feel part of a community correlate to being more civically engaged and having successful adulthoods (Evans, 2007). These elements, in accordance to PAIR’s mission statement, demonstrate that building a sense of community is essential for PAIR programs.

Mattessich, Monsey, and Roy (1997) refer to community building as constructing the social networks within the community, and developing group and individual problem-solving and leadership skills. The process of community building involves many factors, including the following listed by Mattessich, Monsey, and Roy (1997, p. 15): minimal competition in pursuit of goals; widespread participation; progression from simple to complex activities; ability to discuss, reach consensus, and cooperate; and community control over decision making.

Necessity of Building Community

The process of building community is described by Akiva and McGovern (2013) as “a collection of strategies for promoting positive group functions and supporting youth belonging” (p. 90). According to Akiva and McGovern (2013) and Baumeister and Leary (1995), belonging is a fundamental human need. Community Programs to Promote Youth Development (2002), states that the “properties of human development are critical to the design of community programs for youth” (p. 316). In Table 1 components from Erikson’s (1968) theoretical model psychosocial development are lined up with Ferguson and Snipe’s (1997) program cycle for adolescents to show how human developmental needs can be supported by youth programs. Erikson proposes that all people face different developmental tasks that have potential for positive and negative outcomes depending on resolution of that task. The framework of Ferguson and Snipe (1997) proposes the opportunities that youth programs have to facilitate the resolution through methods of building community.

| Table 1 | | |
|---|---|--|
| <i>Erik Erikson’s developed theoretical model of developmental regularities from the perspective of community programs for youth development.</i> | | |
| Stage | Erikson’s Life-Cycle Task | Ferguson and Snipes’s Youth Program Cycle Task |
| Adolescence 12 to 17 years old | <i>Identity vs Identity Confusion.</i> In moving from childhood to adulthood, a person consciously crafts a multidimensional image of self, but may suffer confusion if that identity is not validated and approved by others. | Resolve any tensions between old and new beliefs about one’s self. Assimilate a focused and positive identity that fosters a healthy life style, satisfaction with one’s self and a sense of positive anticipation about one’s future. |
| <i>Adapted from Table A-1 Community Programs to Promote Youth Development (2002, p. 317)</i> | | |

Refugee youth resettled in the United States find themselves in the minority at their new schools and have a hard time fitting in (Schmidt, Morland, & Rose, 2009, p. 7) and finding belonging, as “a lack of cultural adjustment limits communication, acceptance, and inclusion” (Integration Barriers: Perspectives from Refugee Youth, 2016, p.9). Schmidt, Morland, and Rose (2009) state “Immigrant youth need a place that feels safe for them as minorities and a place where they do not feel different from everyone else. Programming for multicultural groups can accomplish this” (p. 8).

Viewing PAIR students as a subset of refugee youth, their backgrounds are wide and varied. They come from twenty-seven countries and speaking over twenty-one different languages (see Appendices B & C). The task of communication by way of speaking with other students, let alone fitting in³, is hard to overcome after resettlement in the United States. One function of PAIR programs is to be a place where those students can find belongingness. PAIR is meant to be a place where students are able to get support from their peers in similar situations, aiding in the solidification of their multicultural identities, and ultimately steering them towards successful futures. Hence, building community in PAIR programs is fundamental in order to address barriers of integration that refugee and immigrant youth face.

Methods of Building Community

Akiva and McGovern (2011) propose many methods and strategies for building community. Both structured and unstructured activities are necessary, although intentional, structured activities are necessary for true group cohesion, as some students will not venture to interact with each other otherwise. Structured activities provide avenues for students of all

³ A common theme I come across when helping refugee students write about their experiences being resettled (for the purposes for scholarships and college applications) is that other students tell them they smell bad, and they often cry in class when they first start going to school because they feel scared and confused.

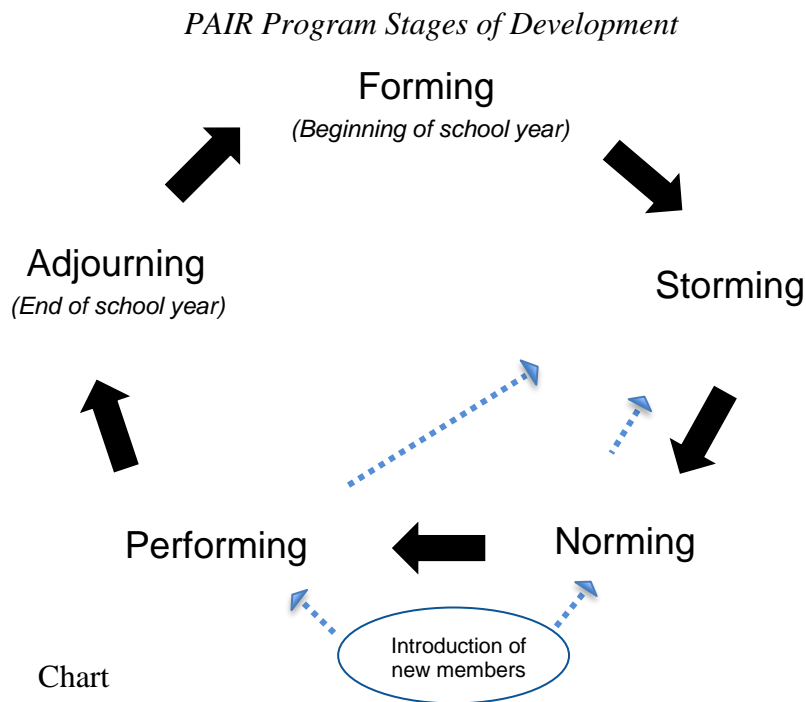
personality types to let down their guards and engage with the group in ways they would not typically in other school settings. Structured activities include “welcomes, icebreakers, problem-solving games, trust games, name games, and partner activities” (p. 92). Peck (1987) explains that learning can be passive or experiential, although experiential is more effective. Ungerleider and Norton (2009) suggest taking social and community time to process, reflect, relax, and informally build relationships. They also underscore the importance of “infusing days with a spirit of celebration” through rituals, songs, group game exercises, and surprises.

Neither the facilitator nor the youth participants should leave anyone out of the activities in order to maintain an inclusive program. This requires the facilitator to monitor student behavior and approach students who are excluding themselves. Akiva and McGovern (2011) note that it is not totally in the facilitators control as to whether or not youth participate, but leading structured group games can help support this norm. They also recommend heavy involvement of the facilitator in terms of participating alongside the youth. Not only does this role model desired behavior, it also facilitates building relationships through involvement with the students, and helps the facilitator stay aware of the group climate and dynamics.

Peck (1987) explains that genuine⁴ communities are able to self-correct when they are having dysfunctional issues. This would suggest that because of the nature and capabilities of the youth in general, and the nature of PAIR programs in duration and member fluctuation, that heavy involvement of the facilitator would be necessary to help with correction. In support of this theory, I have witnessed forms of self-correction happen with the leadership older, veteran students of the program.

⁴ Peck (1987) defines genuine communities as contemplative bodies.

Stages of group development. Tuckman (1965) proposes five stages of group development. Akiva and McGovern (2011) provide insight to these stages through an out-of-school youth program lens. The chart below represents the flow of the stages of development, with additions reflecting the component of ongoing recruitment in PAIR programs (see page 28 for further explanation).



In the first stage, forming, youth are feeling out the group. The facilitator's role in this stage is pivotal, for guidance in both tasks and norms. This is often the time that participants decide if they want to be a part of the group, hence, for voluntary programs this is a defining stage. In this stage it is important to implement many simple name games and icebreakers. During the storming stage, conflicts are common between participants and each other, as well as the facilitator. Groups cannot move out of this stage unless trust is established. In this stage, enforcement of groups norms is essential, and a slight increase in the complexity of ice breakers

and teambuilders *may* be possible. In the norming stage, dynamics are stabilizing as the group comes together and norms emerge and solidify. This is the stage in which commitment and ownership of the program by participants starts taking place. Groups are now able to engage in more complex teambuilding activities and can continue to do so through the rest of the cycle. In the performing stage, group cohesion and functionality occurs. According Peck (1987), as participants become more self-reflective and thoughtful during the community building process, they become more thoughtful about the entire group. In the final stage, adjourning, groups end their time together. It is important to address the ending of the program in this stage, and provide youth with a sense of closure (Ungerleider & Norton, 2009).

Addressing the Challenges to Building Community in PAIR Programs

Building community is essential in PAIR programs in order to facilitate relationship building and trust that paves the way for impactful guidance and empowerment in students' teenage years in a new country, culture, and language. The below sections will discuss some of the significant challenges faced in PAIR programs that must be addressed and overcome in order to building community.

Barriers of Integration for Refugee and Immigrant Youth

The Building Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) model for refugee youth integration barriers addresses four main components: cultural adjustment, language barriers, education, and discrimination (Integration Barriers: Perspectives from Refugee Youth, 2016). According to BRYCS, these components can impact refugee youth negatively by increasing feelings of isolation, fearfulness, frustration, loneliness, and hopelessness. Essentially, barriers to

integration leave students without the community and belongingness to help them through the adolescence stage of their psychosocial development.

The ideal programming elements for refugee and immigrant youth are: recruiting bicultural and/or bilingual staff; including adults as role models and mentors; supporting family relationships; supporting academic and educational achievement; advocating for and with refugee students; and providing socialization, safety and security (Schmidt, Morland, & Rose, 2009, p. 8-10). The following paragraphs will address the elements as they pertain to PAIR programming.

Recruiting bicultural and bilingual staff. Hiring relevant bicultural or bilingual staff has always been a challenge at PAIR because of numerous factors. First of all, because of the diversity of the students served, finding qualified people who speak any of the languages our students speak is rare, as people who natively speak these languages are often refugees themselves and have not been living in the United States for very long. When we do, it is a definite perk, but not a qualification. More importantly it is important that staff have experience with English language learners, and experience learning another language themselves. Another important component of our program is helping our students learn English, and quite often if there is a volunteer or staff present who speaks the same language as a student, they will quickly abandon English when either party gets frustrated. Additionally, it is also difficult to find qualified and interested applicants from the refugee community that also have transportation, as the duty of staff at PAIR is to drive to the program sites, transporting large boxes of supplies and foods, and informally to drive students. One way PAIR is able to hire relevant bicultural and bilingual staff is hiring some of our older, responsible students to work at our summer

programs⁵. They are usually great employees, as they have been participants of the program for many years themselves. They serve as translators and more importantly, great role models for the younger students. This also aligns with PAIR's mission in helping our students gain work experience.

Including adults as role models and mentors. For my personal role, I am cognizant of my identity as a white, American woman in a position of authority over black and brown students. Although I have spent years living in other cultures, have a master's level education in intercultural communication, and learned to speak another language, I am aware of the shortcomings, challenges, and limitations my identity poses when working with refugee youth. Fortunately, as the program is based on mentorship by means of volunteers, PAIR's volunteer base is considerably diverse. As seen in Appendix E, about sixty percent identify as Asian, about thirteen percent as Black or African, about ten percent as Latino, and about ten percent as either White or Middle Eastern. Additionally, as stated above, mature PAIR students are hired as program staff or volunteers for certain roles.

To broaden the scope of people that are able to contribute to PAIR programming⁶, I seek out immigrants, refugees, and other people of color to invite to our programs to talk about their backgrounds and career path.

Role Models. Research shows that compared to students without race and/or gender matched role models, students with race and/or gender matched role models perform better academically, report more achievement-oriented goals and more enjoyment of those activities,

⁵ PAIR is able to employ students of working age over the summer months in the middle school day camp program, as those students are able to use the transportation PAIR provides to the middle school students attending the program.

⁶ Volunteering in the after school programs is limited to people who are able to attend sessions during business hours, such as college students and other people with non-traditional work schedules.

more planning for their futures, and look up to adults rather than their peers (Zirkel, 2002). I highly value role models my students can identify with, and believe strongly in the importance of my students seeing themselves represented in the world as successful and healthy adults.

On top of the theoretical knowledge proving the importance of role models, I have seen in many instances how my students react when provided with opportunities to meet successful adults who look like them. A few years ago, my students had the opportunity to meet some of the players on Houston's professional soccer team. One of the players was American, although his family was from Nigeria. The students listened respectfully. The other player was from west Africa, and he had an accent. He told the students stories about the soccer tryouts he went through in Africa years previous before signing with the American league; having to climb up a coconut tree during break times to get his lunch, and how he sends money back home to his mother to help take care of her and the rest of his family. The students were enamored with this man, jumping out of their chairs to get his attention. They had an infinite amount of questions for him, when typically, during presentation it would be surprising if any student asked a question.

In another instance, a Swahili speaking poet visited a session to lead a workshop on identity. The Swahili speaking students were so excited to converse with the woman. Most of the time students groan when I assign a writing activity, but this time many students enthusiastically wrote beautiful and powerful short essays in both English and their own languages about "What America Would Look Like without Immigrants" (Student Poem, 2017).

Recently, I took my students on a field trip to go see the movie 'Black Panther'. As over seventy-five percent of my students are from African nations (see appendices A & B), it is

important for them to see positive representation⁷ of Africa and African people. Johnson (2018) explains, “Vast audiences will see black heroes of both genders using their scientific ability to solve problems and make their way in the world, at an unrivaled level. Research has shown that such representation can have a positive effect on the interests, outlook and career trajectories of viewers”. Students were jumping out of their chairs, cheering and dancing throughout the movie. At the beginning of the movie, one student said excitedly, ‘they talk like me!’.

I tied the movie into curriculum about the importance of role models so students could intentionally think about who they looked up to and why. I also put a great deal of effort into researching examples of people that looked like my students; from an Ethiopian girl rock band, to black Olympic athletes, to young people of color excelling in science and technology.

Supporting family relationships. Building relationships with my students’ families can be difficult, as they are often unfortunately not able to be highly involved in their children's education. Family members typically have multiple low paying jobs with different weekly schedules, little practical access to English classes, and lack convenient transportation to get to their child’s school. Additionally, the parents of my students may have had different or very little previous experience with their children’s formal education (King & Goodwin, 2002). I conduct multiple rounds of home outreach visits every year to try to get face time with parents or family members. Even though we are often not able to have full conversations, when possible I have the students translate for me. Regardless, I try to convey caring and kindness to show that their child is in good hands.

⁷ “Africa has traditionally been an unsophisticated player in American media, often portrayed as backward, savage, and chaotic in everything from news coverage to films” (Johnson, 2018). Also, see Al Jazeera article “Trump's 'Shithole' Remarks Spur International Anger” (2018).

Advocating for and with refugee youth. I try my best to advocate for my students' needs when I am aware of them; I speak with their teachers when I know their class work is not at level with their language skills, meet with school administrators and social workers to discuss class schedules and behavior, and collaborate with college counselors to help keep students on track to graduate and secure secondary education. For example, during a home outreach visit with a Nepali student who had stopped attending my program, I found out that she was diabetic. She was also a vegetarian, and refused to eat the food the school cafeteria served. She told me every day she would rush home because she was starving, and eat everything in sight. I contacted her school social worker and nurse to make sure they were aware of the student's condition, as oftentimes refugee families do not know to report issues like this, and also so they could discuss proper management of her diabetes. On another occasion, I was trying to help one of my Congolese students with her homework. This student had a very low fluency of English; however, her homework was over the advanced concepts of pathos and ethos. I went with her to visit her teacher about the assignment. I spoke to the teacher about my concerns of her placement in the class. The teacher told me that for scheduling reasons a few low level students had been placed in her intermediate level class, but that she let them use Google Translate. As she was unaware, I informed her that the language the student spoke, Kinyarwanda, was not on Google Translate. This spurred conversation into some of the deeper issues the teacher was facing, and she asked me if I could contact the dean about moving the students into another class. She explained to me that it could be very difficult to get students moved without parent involvement. I contacted the student's dean, and with some persistence, I was able to get the student moved for the next semester.

Supporting academic and educational achievement. I also intentionally build relationships with the English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinators and college counselors at the schools I work in, in order to collaborate on student recruitment, assignments, and curriculum. The curriculum I design for the program is specific to the school district and community my students live in, and includes college access elements to support their academic aspirations. Although college access can be very technical and uninteresting, it is essential that students obtain post-secondary education. An education is the most direct way to help students gain economic mobility, and help their families out of poverty (“Pursuing the American Dream: Economic Mobility Across Generations”, 2012). The program sessions also have designated time for academic tutoring.

There is a separate ESL curriculum of mini-lessons specifically for ESL students new to the country. My colleague and I collaborated with an ESL teacher to create these lessons. During the program session, these students can work on this alternate curriculum until their language competency is fluent enough to comprehend the lesson topics geared towards college access and social and emotional wellbeing.

Socialization, safety and security. Providing socialization, safety and security aligns closely with definition of building community. The basis of the PAIR programs is to provide a space for socialization among students with similar backgrounds and similar needs to be addressed. PAIR is a physically safe space, as it is held at the school site affording the safety that school building provides. Additionally, fighting is not permitted nor tolerated at the program and students know that they will not be allowed to continue at the program should they engage in such behavior. This component is always built in to the social contract created by students at the beginning of the academic year. Security aligns closely with the previous described needs a place

to belong. Additionally, survey data taken compiled from student responses from the previous year point to students feeling certainly or mostly certain that PAIR was a safe place for them, and that they felt like they belonged at PAIR (see Appendices F & G).

Patriarchal Values of PAIR Students' Cultures

PAIR students come from many cultures. One particular commonality of all these cultures is a patriarchal value system. Patriarchy is a system that spans across most modern societies and cultures, with varying levels of rigidity. "Its power remains unchallenged, partly because it is not explicitly recognized" (Wentworth, 2003). Although not frequently addressed in mainstream discourse, there is a strong correlation with patriarchal values and war (Wentworth, 2003). This section will define patriarchal values and how they are relevant to the majority of students being served by PAIR.

Patriarchy. Galtung (1999) describes patriarchy as "an institutionalization of male dominance in vertical structures, with very high correlation between position and gender, legitimized by the culture" (p. 40). Chapman (1998) describes patriarchy as "the systematic domination of women by men and domination of men by other men"(p. 98). Thus, a patriarchal society is one in which there is widespread domination of women by men and men by other men, enabled by that culture.

As Stanistreet, Bambra, and Scott-Samuel (2005) deduce through United Nations statistics, "the relative level of patriarchy could thus be compared between countries using exposure measures, such as female participation in gainful employment, the proportion of women in decision-making positions, or the sex division of household labour" (p. 873). Referencing these statistics for PAIR students' countries of birth and refugee status (See

Appendices B & D), the data would infer relatively high levels of patriarchy. Moreover, Kaufman (2010) states “in many cases the patriarchal structure of the country was the legacy of a colonial past” (p. 81), which would also include PAIR students’ countries of birth and refugee status.

Patriarchy of war. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the definition of a refugee is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence” with “war and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries” (“United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” 2010, p. 3). The vast majority of countries that PAIR students’ families fled from have suffered from devastating wars for years. War zones are inherently patriarchal, as the “violence women suffer in conflict is an extreme manifestation of the discrimination and abuse women face in peacetime, and the unequal power relations between men and women in most societies” (Amnesty International, 2004, p.5). During conflict, women are forced to conform to more traditional feminine gender roles in “which they are subservient to and dependent upon men” (Kaufman, 2010, p.15). Thus, men in turn are also thrust into more traditional masculine gender roles as protectors. Additionally, “the rhetoric, institutions and processes of war and militarization have been described as inherently male-centered, premised on values which prize male aggression and devalue characteristics associated with women” (Amnesty International, 2004, p.8).

According to Vokey (1999), hyper-masculinity (HM) is exaggerated beliefs about what it means to be a man. “HM consists of four interrelated beliefs, namely toughness as emotional self-control, violence as manly, danger as exciting, and calloused attitudes toward women”. Additionally, according to the most popular academic scales used to rank traits of masculinity

across many cultures, common attitudes and behaviors associated with extreme masculine gender roles are: competition in terms of winning and status, restrictive emotionality with the exception of anger often through aggression, and restricted affection between men (Boyce & Buchholz, 2009, p. 207). Furthermore, Boyce and Buchholz state standards of masculinity include the attributes of: manifesting power and control, being independent and self-reliant, exhibiting stoicism both in terms of denying physical discomfort and ignoring emotional anguish (p.71). As children start displaying gender role traits as young as two years old (Levant et al, 1992), young boys internalize these extreme masculine gender roles as they witness them from key figures in their lives growing up in war zones and refugee camps.

Many refugees that are resettled in the United States are placed in inner cities, and according to researchers, “levels of PTSD in US inner cities are comparable to those in refugee populations around the world” (Strasser & Semler, 2017). Thus, similar values are continuing to be reinforced in similar environments. Furthermore, students affected by trauma have difficulty learning and building relationships.

Influence of patriarchal values on building sense of community. A comparison between the key terms involved in building a sense of community and patriarchal values results in two categories at stark contrast with each other in Table 2.

When comparing Mattessich, Monsey, and Roy’s factors of the community building process, they too are at odds with patriarchal values and attitudes. Minimal competition in pursuit of goals is the opposite of competition for status and achievements’ sake. Widespread participation, which is necessary for progression of tasks as well as cooperation and community consensus, is stifled in environments of stoicism and toughness.

| Table 2 | |
|---|---|
| Elements of Environment Necessary to Build Sense of Community | Patriarchal Masculinity |
| Supportive (providing encouragement or emotional help) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stoicism ● Restricted affection between men ● Restrictive emotionality (aside from anger) ● Being independent/self-reliant |
| Trust (firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Calloused attitudes towards women ● Competition: winning and status |
| Safety (the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Violence as manly ● Danger as exciting ● Aggression |

Adding on another layer of complexities is the likelihood that many of the PAIR students have experienced trauma, either in their home countries or after being resettled in inner city Houston. This further convolutes the process of building a sense of community, as participants are predisposed to having difficulty learning and making relationships.

I see many of these factors play out in PAIR programs. Many of the boys try to act cool, i.e. tough and stoic, in front of each other and refuse to participate fully in activities. They call each other derogatory names, including homophobic slurs, and will refuse to hold hands during teambuilding activities, or do any other activities they perceive to be feminine. This often makes it difficult for male groups to complete simple team building activities during the forming and norming stages of PAIR group development. Also, as the lead female facilitator, I find it more challenging to garner respect from some the boys. The girls are often shy and hesitant to share their thoughts and opinions. Some have tendencies to avoid the boys, and were previously educated in separate environments. It is common for some of the female siblings to be absent from the program because of guardians requiring them home for chores and babysitting, while

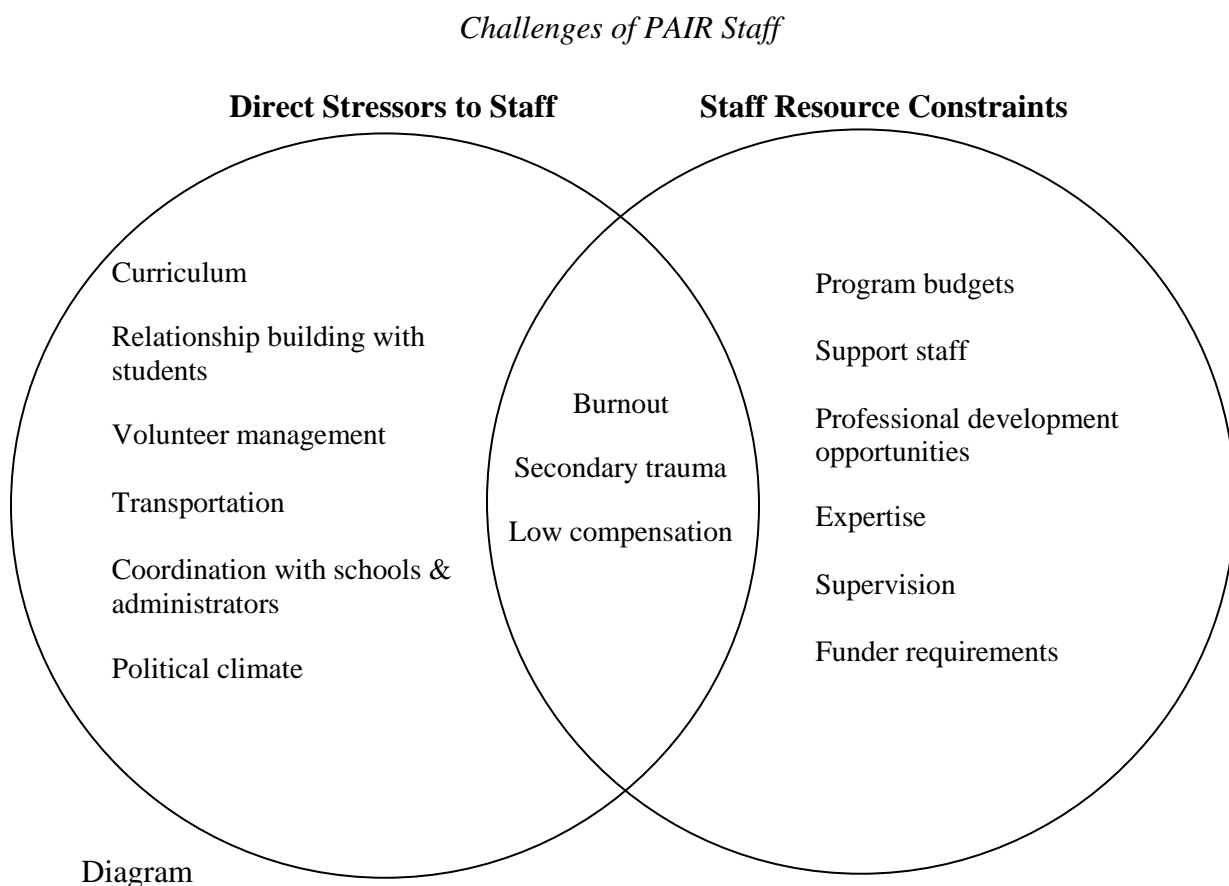
their brothers are able to attend. On the flip side, some of the boys are no longer able to attend the program once they turn sixteen, as they are expected to get a job to help support their family.

Strategies to address patriarchal values. Building community to combat these challenges is an intentional, persistent and ongoing process. I want my students *to want* to be at PAIR, in an inclusive atmosphere where they feel supported and are able to put down their walls and support others. Many of my strategies entail methods learned from SIT Graduate Institute Youth Program Leadership course, as well as experience gained along the way working in the public school system. The main strategies are: appropriate icebreakers and teambuilders at the beginning of each session, spending multiple days on social contracts and reviewing them throughout the year, a low tolerance for disrespectful behavior, collaboration with (often male) volunteers on strategies to engage some of the more difficult male students, practicing names every day, intentional relationship building activities woven into the curriculum, finding role models who look like my students to be guest presenters, and having fun whenever we can. These activities have proven to be effective in breaking down patriarchal barriers over time, and have been instrumental in building a sense of building in PAIR programs.

Logistical Challenges Faced by Staff

Strategies for building community require the facilitator to be “actively involved with youth in group- building activities; to work to include all youth; to be mindful of issues of power, youth comfort, and the experiences of new members; to promote cooperation over competition; and to promote explicit intergroup dialog” (Akiva & McGovern, 2013, p. 90). In PAIR programs, the facilitator is the program manager. The program manager has many responsibilities to juggle. In addition to being actively involved, there are a complex list of

logistics that enable the program to function (see “Direct Stressors to Staff” below). All of this must be done within the constraints of the resource a small non-profit organization has available (see “Staff Resource Constraints” below), amidst the stress that accompanies fulfilling these duties over the short and long term (see the intersection of “Direct Stressors to Staff” and “Staff Resource Constraints” below). The main challenges faced by staff on PAIR programs are depicted in the diagram below.



Direct stressors to staff. While trying to create an environment of belonging, the program manager must create curriculum that is not only relevant, engaging, and impactful for refugee youth with varying levels of English proficiency, but also able to be implemented by college student volunteers with minimal training, and oftentimes minimal commitment. Part of

building community is also establishing supportive relationships with participants of the program. A first step to this is time consuming home outreach to families. During the program, this requires dedicating yourself wholly to the students for the duration of the session, regardless of what is happening your life. This includes memorizing names, being enthusiastic and supportive, remembering what is happening in their lives and checking in, and managing that dynamic throughout the session while managing behavior, discipline, and enforcing participation when necessary. Session attendance ranges anywhere from twenty to forty students, and there are another ten to fifteen different sets of college students volunteering every day. Thus, the program manager is facilitating sessions of forty to sixty people; leading icebreakers, teambuilders, meeting with volunteers for agenda briefings, transitioning students into mentoring groups, and monitoring mentoring groups throughout the session, all while maintaining the demeanor and dynamics listed above. In summary, the program manager is responsible for an intense amount of interpersonal tasks and logistics.

At the end of the sessions the program manager has to also ensure students get home safely in neighborhoods with high crime rates⁸. A bus is hired to take the majority of students home, but it is not an uncommon occurrence for the bus to be over half an hour late, or even not show up, which requires many phone calls and waiting on hold while monitoring students. Parents can become upset if students arrive home late, and may not continue to allow their children to attend the program. Bus drivers can become irritated with PAIR students because they are not used to working with youth who do not speak English fluently. It is necessary to build a relationship with the bus driver to ensure there are not misunderstandings on the bus ride

⁸ News of shootings at students' apartment complexes has happened during program sessions, and I have had to ensure that the home is safe to return to before dismissing the student. Gang violence is prevalent in the areas that students and their families are resettled in.

home. Misunderstandings and behavioral problems can lead to the driver refusing the route, or discourages students from coming to the program because they do not want to take the bus home. I always give the bus driver my personal cell phone number so that they can contact me if they are having any issues with their route. After the bus departs, the program supplies and space must be cleaned up to how it was before the session, helping keep a positive relationship with school contacts. A debrief session with the volunteers follows, and afterwards the program manager often personally takes home students in rush hour traffic who live too far off the bus route.

Before, during, and after school sessions, the program manager is also responsible for maintaining relationships with school administrators and teachers, and overall having a presence in the school community. Their support is crucial in having smooth programs and an understanding of our students' academics and extracurricular activities; securing a space, recruiting students, background checking volunteers, communication on school policies, events, standardized testing, referring students to other services, supporting students' academics, etc.

In recent years, the political climate regarding refugee issues has permeated the atmosphere of service providers and advocates for refugees (Okawa & Northwood, 1999). Job security has become an issue as refugee resettlement as funding has been dramatically lowered for some organizations, further dissolving support for a population that is already underserved. These trends show no sign of letting up (Rosenberg, 2018). Such disparaging times call for action from people that already give so much. It is hard not to have a bleak outlook and feel powerless.

Staff resource constraints. The program manager must also manage the above listed responsibilities within the constraints that the organization has in order to operate. The bulk of

the funds unrelated to staff costs go to transportation for after school sessions, field trips, and volunteer ride shares to the program sites. There are also funds designated for snacks every program session, and basic supplies. The organization is able to provide one part-time support staff for the high school programs who mostly works on-site to help with the facilitation of the program. This position typically has yearly turnover as the wages, hours, and job description limits the applicants to those who are looking for work in those constraints; likely students or those in other transitional periods.

Useful professional development opportunities are hard to come by, as working with such a unique and underserved population correlates with underdeveloped systems and resources for serving them in general. Most opportunities are related to implementing after school programs. To create the accessibility for PAIR's target population requires a deeper level of engagement, unique and adapted curriculum, volunteer recruitment and coordination, and relationships with the community, than many other youth programs. Additionally, with my personal background of a master's level education in youth program leadership, I am often more qualified than those leading the trainings. I am required by grants that fund my programs to attend these, which often leaves me frustrated as an ineffective use of my time. Other funder stipulations require extra home outreach to get additional documents signed by guardians, and people who do not know me or my students visiting my program for evaluation. Furthermore, many of the funds come with stipulations that prevent the money from helping the organization in any other capacity than direct program related cost, i.e. not staff salaries.

Intersection of direct stressors and resource constraints. As a youth development professional who provides direct services to refugee youth, I agree wholeheartedly with the National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health's manual on Issues and Resources in Refugee

Mental Health. It states that, “working with refugees can be among the most rewarding and energizing of experiences. It can also, at times, leave a worker feeling drained, hopeless and lacking energy” (Okawa & Northwood, 1999, p. 76). Additionally, “Since many refugees have experienced major losses or life-shattering events, it follows that many people who work with refugees—be they advocates, case workers, counselors, lawyers, nurses, immigration workers, judges, volunteers, teachers, doctors, or others—are subject to job-related stress or to secondary traumatization⁹ and its effects” (Northwood, 1999, p. 84). Reading this felt incredibly validating and resonated deeply with me. I am fortunate to have a small support system of colleagues to informally celebrate and air out the grievances of our work. In general, the role feels undervalued both on a macro and micro level; by society as a whole, and the organization in which I am employed. Compensation for the job duties I perform is enough to pay for my rent, my income based student loan payment, car payment, groceries, and little else. Over three years into working at my organization, my salary is thirty percent lower than that of a first year teacher in the school district I work in. Low compensation contributes to feelings of disposability and under appreciation (Northwood, 1999).

Burnout is defined as a “state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that occurs when we feel overwhelmed by too many demands, too few resources, and too little recovery time” (Kanter & Sherman, 2016, p. 8). Burnout stems from “gradual exposure to job strain, erosion of idealism, a void of achievement, and accumulation of intensive contact with clients” (Okawa & Northwood, 1999, p. 82). Furthermore, “low wages and high workload combined with personal passion and strong beliefs in the mission create the perfect storm to burn people out”

⁹ Secondary trauma is defined by the manual as the “effects of working with people who have experienced trauma and being exposed to the difficult stories they share”, a “normal and inevitable part of working with those who have suffered terrible events” (p. 84).

(Kanter & Sherman, 2016, p.14). Burnout leads to high turnover, which disrupts relationship building and systems put into place, and therefore the process of building community. The culmination of the many previously mentioned challenges also lead to burnout, as a culture shaped by financial constraints at an organization “manifests in a number of ways including personal financial strain, not enough staff or systems in places, and lack of investment in professional and leadership development. A culture dominated by ‘do without’ thinking accelerates staff burnout” (Kanter & Sherman, 2016, p. 14).

The program manager faces many challenges in implementing community building strategies. The everyday stressors of managing program dynamics, being present for students, facilitating relationship building, logistics, and a demoralizing political climate combined with low resources and underappreciation create a high amount of stress. This ongoing stress can easily lead to burnout, which “saps energy, breeds negativity, reduces productivity, and can lead to feeling hopeless and even resentful” (Kanter & Sherman, 2016, p. 8), a state that is not conducive to taking on those challenges. The cycle continues, propelled by the guilt of not being able to put your best self into your work and support of the students.

Community building in PAIR programs cannot be done successfully without a qualified and supported program manager and their dedicated efforts. Without addressing the challenges the program manager faces, the process of building and maintaining community and high quality programming is continually at risk.

Of all the obstacles discussed in this paper, the toughest to address are the challenges faced by the staff implementing community building strategies. These challenges also pose the most danger to a strong sense of community and high quality programming. With the right training and hard work, PAIR staff can provide the dedication, consistency, and patience. But,

the level of organizational support they are provided is mostly out of their control.

Overwhelming evidence shows that a lack of support is, and has been, the nonprofit industry norm.

Program Specific Methods of Building Community in PAIR Programs

The programs I facilitate have a routine schedule in order to “build rhythm and ritual...familiarity and continuity to the days” (Ungerleider & Norton, 2009), as taught in the Youth Program Leadership Course at SIT Graduate Institute by Simon Norton and Dr. John Ungerleider. Establishing routine helps students know what to expect and follow along accordingly, promoting a proven sense of safety, security, and belonging (see Appendices F & G).

I use both formal and informal methods for building community. An example of the former: As students arrive I greet every student by name and in a friendly manner, as I consider names an important component of relationship building, and additionally “a welcoming atmosphere may be important as child perceptions of teacher caring have been linked to positive behavioral outcomes” (Akiva & McGovern, 2013, p. 91). Student and volunteers have time to arrive, put on their name tags, and settle in playing board games until it is time for the big group structured activity to kick off the session. I rarely let anyone sit this out. I learned early on that not being strict with enforcing participation is a detriment to the whole group. It is a chain effect; students see other students not participating and think they can do the same, which can make the students who are participating feel insecure. It is common for newer students to feel shy and uncertain and try to hide, but by enforcing participation from the beginning students know what

is expected of them if they are going to be a part of PAIR. Buy-in is important for building community.

The attention grabber implemented is a (typically) staff call of “Hey, PAIR!” to which students respond by stopping what they are doing, and in unison yell “Hey, what?!” and wait for instructions. This happens multiple times a session, but most routinely to start the big group ice breaker. During which, we often greet and cheer for new people, if there are any. At the beginning of the year we play multiple name games, but after the group has moved out of the storming stage we will only play a quick name game to help refresh students and volunteers, and then move on to a teambuilding game. Teambuilding games serve an important purpose in our programs. They help both students and volunteers get comfortable with each other, and encourage relationship building. This is supported by Orlick (2006), who explains that community building activities offer multiple structured for youth to build relationships and create feelings of group belonging. As the semester goes on, we are able to attempt more intricate teambuilders. The teambuilders we engage in are typically appropriate for all levels of English language speakers; they either require little talking and relatively easy instructions, or can be easily modeled after myself, the volunteers, or other students. I also leave time for students to translate for each other, check for understanding, and do practice rounds. I generally always lead and participate in the teambuilder or icebreaker to set an example and encouraging participation of everyone, but as the semester goes on I am able to call on others to lead and model. I do not ask anything of the participants to do anything I would not be willing to do myself. Next, my assistant monitors students while they form small groups to work with their mentors on the day’s lesson, and I briefly go over the curriculum with the mentors to help promote impactful implementation. Mentors are often young college students, unfamiliar with the content and

activities, and unsure of how to engage the refugee students they are working with. Along with clarifying the activities they will be leading, this time also serves to remind them that we are all a team and helps to build comradery and increasing feelings of ownership in the program. Mentors then disperse to work with groups of students, and I monitor and help facilitate that process when necessary.

Often towards the end of the session the mentoring groups will practice their English and public speaking by presenting to the big group what they worked on. I strongly discourage students making fun of others and promote active listening, as well as big rounds of applause for each person who is brave enough to present. The day concludes with a group drum roll and the announcement of the recipient of the ‘Student of the Day’ award, a surprise many students look forward to.

Transitions become increasingly easier through the semester, and new students catch on quickly modeling the rest of the group. It is important to note that establishing routine and building community has required intentional persistence and patience over years, and is a continual process.

Routine, unstructured and structured activities with a heavy emphasis on teambuilders, enforcing participation, and inclusion and support on all levels are all key elements for building community. Though a demanding process, building community is an invaluable component of empowering refugee and immigrant youth.

Factoring Stages of Group Development in PAIR Community Building Methods

Although many students in the program return from the previous year, the combination of new students, time away, new volunteer mentors, and adjusting to a new school year overall puts the groups back into the forming stage. The more returning students and volunteers there are, the

smoother the transitions between stages are. Because PAIR is recruiting new refugee and immigrant students throughout the year as they arrive, it is important to be mindful of the stages of development, and set expectations and community building strategies accordingly. The introduction of new students, even towards the end of an academic year, can revert norming and performing groups back to the storming stage, in which community building tactics must be adjusted accordingly.

Oftentimes the bulk of the new students are incoming ninth graders in their first year of high school. This refers to both at the beginning of the school year, and throughout as well; high school aged students who come to the United States with interrupted education and/or limited English proficiency are usually placed in ninth grade, regardless of their age. For ninth grade students who have been resettled for some time already, many have experience in PAIR's middle school programs, which is a vastly different model in terms of content and activities. The beginning of the year can be a hard transition for some of these students, most notably the boys who are used to getting recess time and get overly rambunctious during icebreaker and teambuilding activities. These students also have a hard time with content, as college access material, on top of being dry at times, seems very theoretical as a young mind has a hard time comprehending the decisions they make now will come in to play four years later when it is time to graduate.

The forming stage slips easily into storming, and I find myself being strict about the set norms and often disciplining students. In this stage students are testing the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Although not my favorite time or role as a facilitator, I have learned the hard way that this is incredibly necessary in order to move out of the storming stage and well worth the reward of successful program sessions and climate in the future. The mind set and hard

work put in during the storming stage makes the transition from the norming to the performing stage a pleasant surprise. I have cautioned myself from getting too comfortable in these stages, because when some new students enter the mix, this dynamic can be thrown right back into the storming stage. Some students acclimate easily into the groups, while others pose more of a challenge (refer back to the figure on page 8). Often times throughout the year older students who had been on hiatus from the program because of their involvement in other extracurricular activities will return periodically. I often notice an interesting attitude among them, they resort back to the storming stage, feeling slightly out of place of the group cohesion that has formed in their absence, and they try to act too cool to participate. This has the potential to upset the group dynamic so much that they slip back into the storming stage. When I notice this happening, I pull them aside. Previous relationship building with these students is very useful, as I explain that I am very happy to see them, but they know the rules at PAIR. I explain to the student that I want them to be there, but if you want to be here you have to participate. I also respect their maturity and tell them that as an older student, I expect them to be a role model for the younger ones. This conversation tends to be effective, and also serves as a deterrent for non-regular attending students to drop in whenever they feel like it to exclusively socialize with some of their friends and then leave when we start structured lesson time. I make it clear that I am holding them accountable for their actions.

To support the process of new students entering the programs, those students are introduced to the PAIR norms as soon as possible. The first thing they do is make a name tag. I go over the social contract, letting them know it was created by the other students, and explain to them what their expected behavior is if they want to participate in PAIR. I also make sure they understand PAIR's attention grabber, and make them practice with me until they understand.

Next, I pair the student with a volunteer, who brings them into a group who is either playing games or working on an activity. When I have behavioral issues with new students, I pull them aside to speak with them directly. I reiterate the social contract, and let them know that I feel disrespected by their behavior. I also tell them that if I need to speak with them again about their behavior it will be to ask them to leave for the day. When that happens, I let them know that I hope to see them again the next session, but their behavior is unacceptable today.

Another component of the stages of development is how the volunteers fit in. The focus is to build community for the students' sake, with the help of the volunteers; although as a group the volunteers have a much less steep curve of integration compared to the students. Volunteers only commit to ten weeks at a time for a two hour session once a week¹⁰. The students, on the other hand, are attending twice as many sessions, on top of occasional weekend field trips, while seeing each other during school hours. Additionally, levels of commitment vary among the busy college students. Even though I build in intentional time for both structured and unstructured relationship building time, it is up to the volunteer to take those opportunities seriously. Just as it is ultimately up to the youth to participate, the level of engagement is up to the volunteers. PAIR requires mandatory training sessions at the beginning of each semester, but has had little luck with interest or attendance in other optional training activities.

Volunteers can also be an asset in community building once they themselves go through the forming and storming stages, and develop their own ownership of the program. They can serve as role models for students, help address behavior issues¹¹, and lead important discussions.

¹⁰ That is if they have perfect attendance. This is not the norm, as upwards of eighty percent do not. Usually during volunteer appreciation events, those few volunteers who did have perfect attendance are recognized.

¹¹ Although this is often difficult, as some volunteers are not able delineate between friend and mentor, and are uncomfortable disciplining.

Volunteers who make it out of the storming stage often return for more semesters to mentor students.

Conclusions

There are many complex challenges that must to be addressed in order to build community in PAIR programs. They include barriers to cultural integration refugee and immigrant youth face, the patriarchal values inherent in many refugee and immigrant cultures, and the logistical challenges PAIR staff face implementing community building strategies. These challenges are not insurmountable with the implementation of proven strategies that are backed up by dedication, consistency, patience, and organizational support.

In addressing barriers to cultural integration in PAIR programs, it is necessary to recruit staff that is sensitive to, and knowledgeable about, issues facing refugee youth, incorporate relatable adult role models into programming, conduct home outreach to promote family support of the program, advocate for students' holistic needs, collaborate with teachers and school administrations to support students' academic aspirations, and provide a safe and secure space for socialization with unstructured time for students to relax, and structured time for teambuilding activities. In addressing the patriarchal values of student's native cultures, it is necessary to counter behavior destructive to community building with strategies such as setting expectations with routine and by setting and enforcing norms, following through with consequences when norms are broken, leading structured activities like icebreakers and teambuilders appropriate for ESL learners and the stage of group development program participants are in, and incorporating positive and relevant role models. In addressing the logistical challenges staff face, it is necessary for staff and management to collaborate in identifying, and addressing, the gaps in organizational support.

Creating impactful youth programming that is appropriate for refugee youth is a massive and important endeavor, as refugee youth often lack support of their psychosocial development that is priming their futures. Beneath all of the theory there are many of practical tactics for building community to support that development. Implementation of those tactics vary among different youth and youth groups, as youth programming is never a one size fits all approach. Intensive levels of involvement from the facilitator promotes relationship building, which supports community building. This enables the facilitator to adapt methods and strategies to fit the group of students being served, and address their particular needs to support those students' wellbeing and future aspirations.

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com.reference.sit.edu/docview/1779250597?accountid=45073

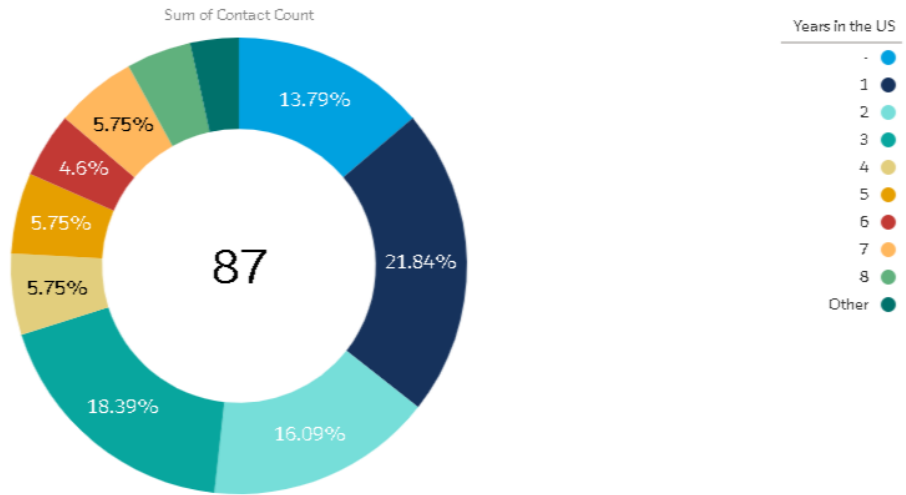
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Appendix A

Number of Students in 2017-2018 PAIR High School Programs and Year in United States

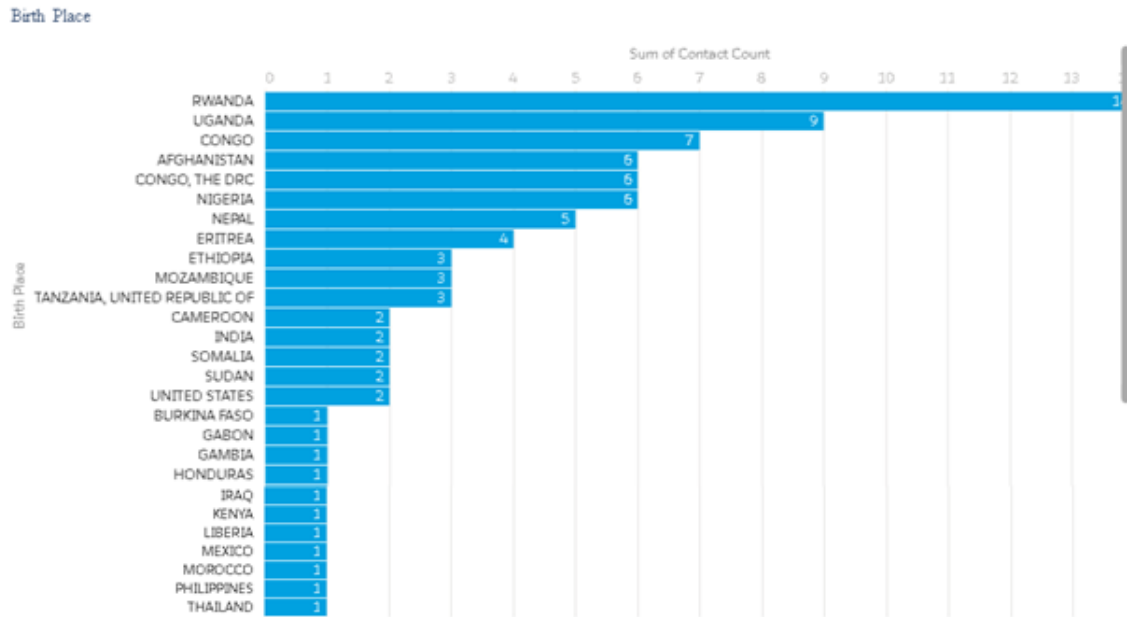
Years in US



Mar 4, 2018 2:51 PM - Viewing as Shama Holm

Appendix B

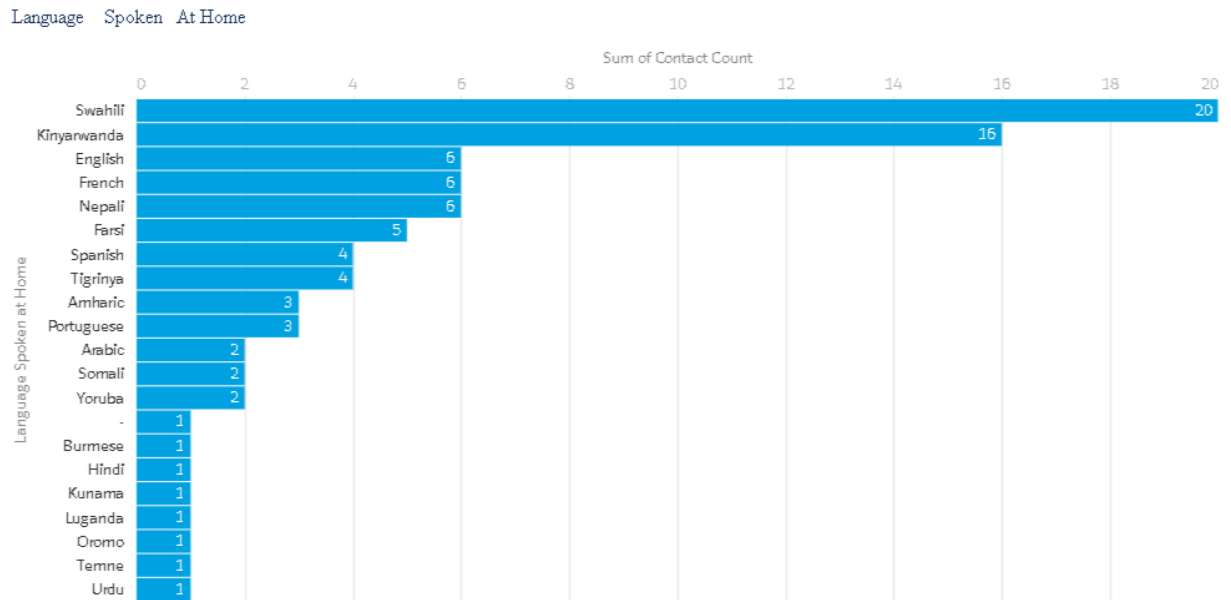
Birth Place of Students in 2017 PAIR High School Programs



Mar 4, 2018 4:10 PM - Viewing as Shaina Holm

Appendix C

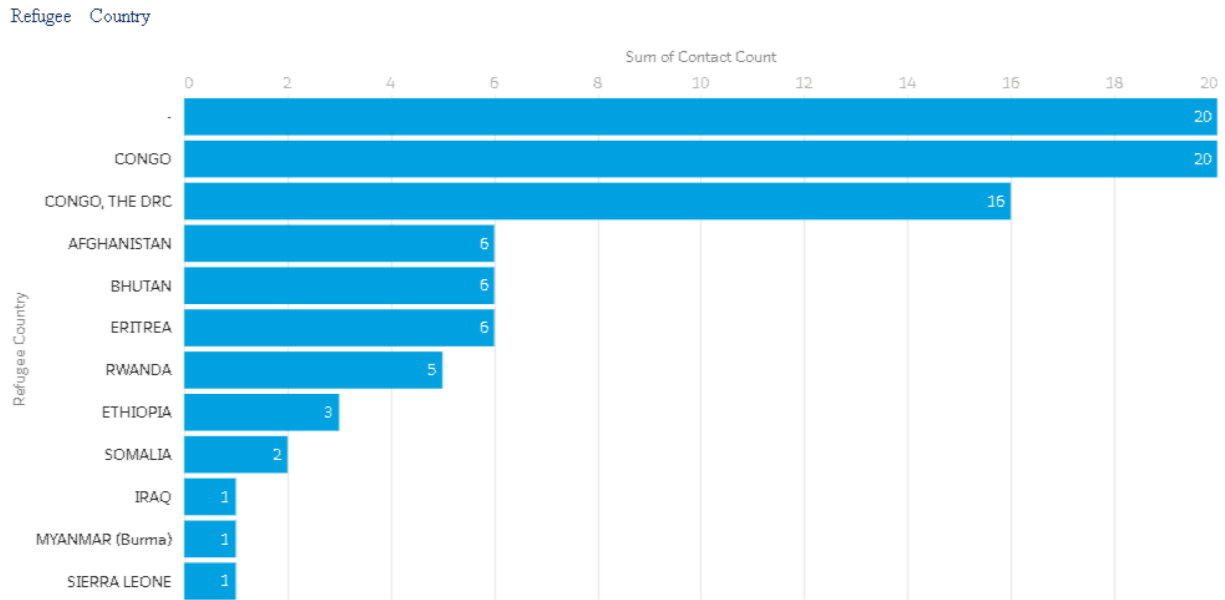
Native Languages Spoken by Students in 2017-2018 PAIR High School Programs



Mar 4, 2018 2:51 PM - Viewing as Shaina Holm

Appendix D

Refugee Status Countries of Students in 2017-2018 PAIR High School Programs

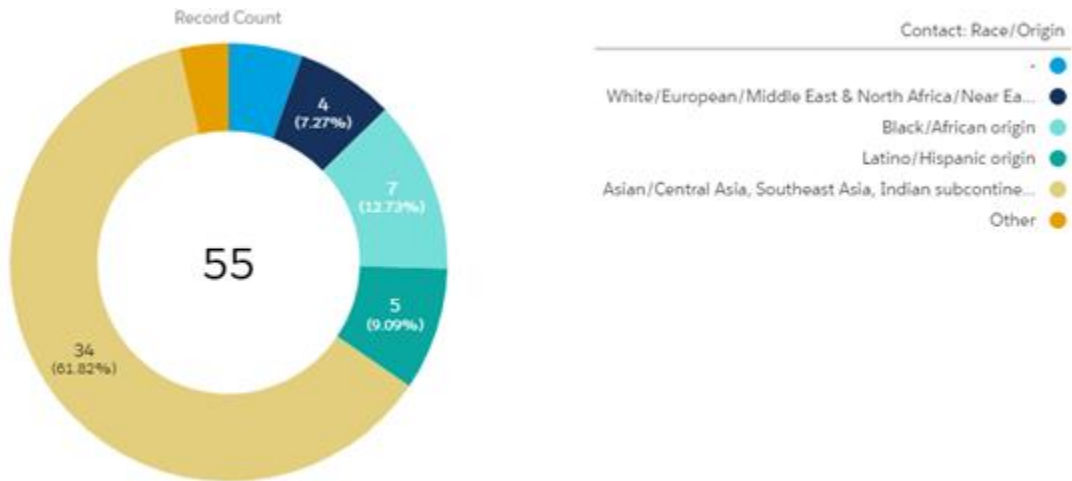


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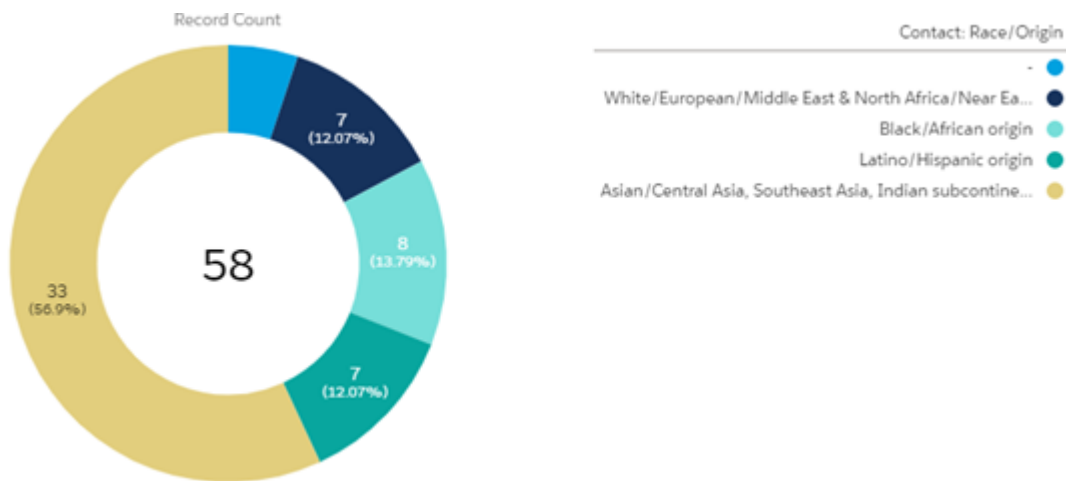
Appendix E

Volunteer Ethnicities in 2017-2018 PAIR High School Programs

Fall 2017 Semester

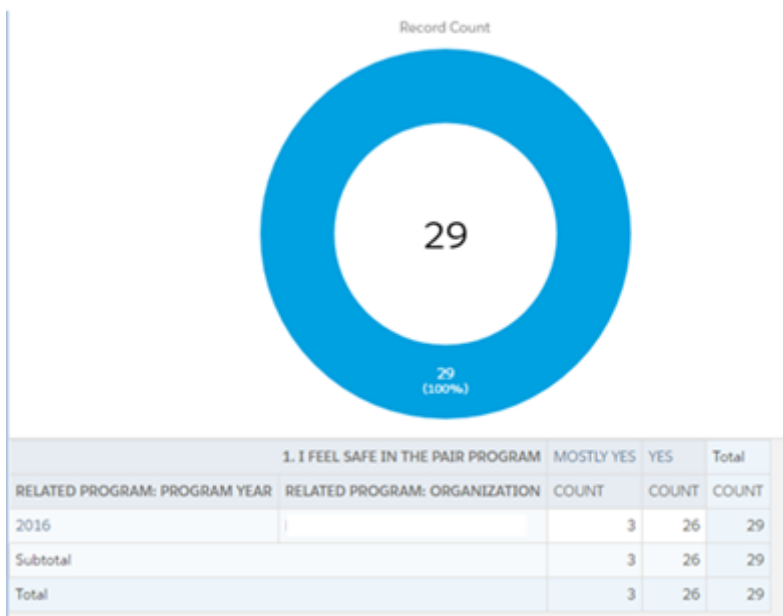
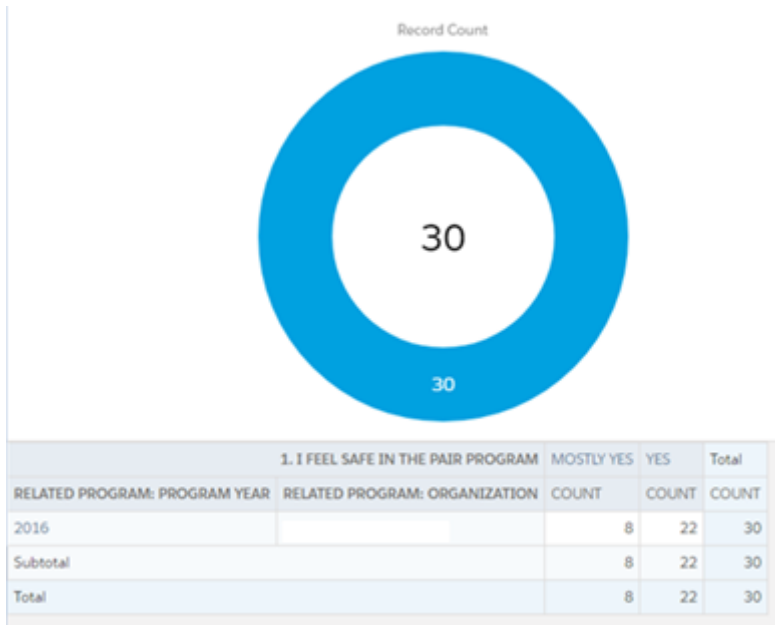


Spring 2018 Semester



Appendix F

Survey Data from Students in 2016-2017 PAIR High School Programs: “I feel safe in PAIR programs”



Appendix G

Survey Data from Students in 2016-2017 PAIR High School Programs: “I feel like I belong here at PAIR”

