

REPORT ON WORKSHOP: REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND EDUCATION IN NEW ENGLAND

APRIL 2002.

The objective of the meeting was to host a two-day meeting to discuss the educational and social needs of refugee youth being re-settled in the Boston area. Participants were invited from a number of resettlement and refugee welfare agencies in the Boston and Portland regions as well as teachers, youth workers, volunteers and representatives from refugee community organizations. In addition we were joined by representatives of refugee sending organizations in East Africa. Key highlights of the meeting included the active participation of and presentations by a number of youth from the Boston and Portland area.

The meeting agenda over the two-day period covered the following issues:

- Life in a refugee camp in Africa.
- Orientation and preparation of refugees coming to America.
- Arrival in America, working with volunteers and other agencies.
- The importance of refugee remittances, networks and other connections.
- School and dealing with refugee cultures...A teacher's perspective.
- School and dealing with American culture.... A refugee's perspective.
- America and Youth culture....a refugee parent's perspective.
- Fostering Refugee Youth.....a foster parent's perspective.
- Setting up a refugee community organization....Experiences from the Sudanese Community in Philadelphia.
- Working with refugee organizations....an academic perspective...speakers from Boston University and Tufts University.
- Voices of Youth.....Sudanese, Cambodian and Rwandan youth.

A number of key issues were raised:

- The importance of knowing refugee backgrounds.
- The issue of academic labeling and different standards of education between refugee home schooling and American schooling.
- The importance of involving refugee parents in school activities and supporting homework clubs etc.
- Education is often much more highly regarded by refugee communities than many of their hosts and refugee youth are puzzled by an American youth culture that does not value education.
- Different attitudes to discipline between refugee families, school and US communities cause many problems.
- Many inter-generational conflicts arise within refugee families due to "Youth culture clash" and families fearing loss of their youth to different values, morals, etc.
- Many schools and welfare agencies do not understand the extremely political nature of identity and wanting to retain links with home by refugees from war affected countries.

Follow-up issues discussed:

- ❖ Tufts University students encouraged to form links with refugee organizations to support and advocate for them as well as to work with individual youth as “mentors”, “buddies” “counselors” friends etc.**
- ❖ Tufts research centers to do relevant research on issues affecting refugee resettlement in Boston area.**
- ❖ University academics and others encouraged to work and advocate for peace and development in conflict affected countries.**
- ❖ Academics encouraged to work with schools and other refugee welfare agencies to provide good background information on refugee cultures, political situation etc.**

Next Steps:

- ✓ Second meeting to be held in March 2003 to regroup invitees and discuss other issues.
- ✓ Monitor situation of proposed relocation of 10,000 Somalis to USA in 2003/4 and identify areas to support Boston agencies in this endeavor.
- ✓ Prepare booklet on refugee issues for use in schools.

The Feinstein International Famine Center would like to thank all who supported the acquiring of this grant.

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