Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____   _____
Maya M. Rao   Date

Promoting Well-Being of Refugee Youth During Resettlement:

A Formative Evaluation of the Young Women's Leadership Program

By

Maya Rao
Master of Public Health

Hubert Department of Global Health

_____
Fauzia Aman Malik
Committee Chair

_____
Bettina Dennis
Committee Member

Promoting Well-Being of Refugee Youth During Resettlement:

A Formative Evaluation of the Young Women's Leadership Program

By

Maya Rao

B.A., Emory College, 2009

Thesis Committee Chair: Fauzia Aman Malik, MSc

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Health
in Hubert Department of Global Health
2014

Abstract

Promoting Well-Being of Refugee Youth During Resettlement:
A Formative Evaluation of the Young Women's Leadership Program

By Maya Rao

Introduction: Refugees face challenges in social, emotional and psychological well-being during the resettlement process. Factors, such as self-sufficiency, educational attainment and social support can impact these dimensions of well-being by affecting a refugee's ability to access health services and manage stressors during resettlement. This special studies project evaluated Refugee Family Services' Young Women's Leadership Program to determine whether or not its efforts addressed similar factors affecting the well-being of female, adolescent refugees resettled in the Atlanta area.

Methods: I conducted a formative evaluation of the program's first year of implementation, using primary and secondary data sources. I collected primary data from observations of workshops and key informant interviews with organizational staff. Secondary data included organizational documents, pre/post workshop assessments, pre/post internship assessments, a focus group transcript and written mentor feedback. I used the paired t-test in SAS software package version 9.3 to analyze significant changes in pre/post assessment scores and conducted qualitative, thematic analysis of the focus group transcript and mentor reports.

Results: Workshop and internship assessments demonstrated a significant increase in scores measuring the following factors related to self-sufficiency and healthy behavior: job performance, financial literacy, self-defense and nutrition. Mentor feedback and focus group responses demonstrated perceived improvements in participants' self-esteem, self-confidence, social skills, and academic performance. Responses also highlighted unmet needs related to effective communication, community engagement and management of social and economic stressors. A review of organizational documents identified that 8 of 14 program outcomes were not assigned specific, measurable indicators to facilitate collection of evaluation data.

Discussion and Public Health Significance: Participants experienced improvements within the program's objectives of social and emotional development, academic engagement and self-sufficiency. However, language proficiency and socioeconomic stressors presented challenges in fully achieving program objectives. If unaddressed, these challenges can pose barriers to accessing health services and can increase mental health risks among refugee youth. It is recommended that the program address these challenges through additional trainings and resources that promote stress management and access to health services. The addition of clearly defined indicators would also benefit the program by allowing for a more accurate determination of program impacts.

Promoting Well-Being of Refugee Youth During Resettlement:

A Formative Evaluation of the Young Women's Leadership Program

By

Maya Rao

B.A., Emory College, 2009

Thesis Committee Chair: Fauzia Aman Malik, MSc

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Health
in Hubert Department of Global Health
2014

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that resettled refugees are vulnerable to negative health outcomes due to the stress of adapting to a new environment, difficulty accessing basic resources and limited amount of support provided during the resettlement process (Beiser, 2009; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2010; Willis & Nkwocha, 2006). In addition to these challenges, studies have demonstrated that refugee youth may face added stressors from adjusting to new school environments, serving as cultural and linguistic liaisons for parents and transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Crowley, 2009; Weine, 2008). Stressors of resettlement have been shown to be associated with a sense of disconnection from the community, low self-esteem and other adverse social and psychological health outcomes (Fazel & Stein, 2002; Weine, 2008). Consequently, providing adequate social support and services that strengthen one's ability to manage stressors in the resettlement process is essential for ensuring positive outcomes of health and well-being among refugee youth.

As a state with one of the largest populations of refugees in the U.S., Georgia resettles approximately 2500-3000 refugees per year (CRSA, 2014). Under the purview of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Office of Refugee Resettlement partners with Georgia's and other state's departments of human services to fund programs that support refugees in the resettlement process (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). In concert with The Department of Health and Human Service's mission of providing essential services that help individuals and families live healthy, successfully lives, the Office of Refugee Resettlement provides a limited amount of funding for social services focused on employment-related activities, health care access,

English language instruction and case management for refugees (HHS). In addition to this support, the State of Georgia also relies on non-profit organizations to facilitate the resettlement process and address other unmet needs among its refugee population.

Refugee resettlement agencies have established offices in metro Atlanta in order to assist in meeting the basic needs of this growing population within the area. These agencies include Refugee Resettlement and Immigration Services of Atlanta, the International Rescue Committee and Lutheran Services of Georgia among others (DHS, 2013). Several other organizations that implement programs for refugees outside of resettlement services include the Community Service Board, Refugee Women's Network and Refugee Family Services. These organizations support refugees by connecting them to services and resources to which they are entitled, transfering skills that increase self-sufficiency and providing services that fill unmet needs in order to ensure a successful resettlement process.

This special studies project aims to examine the effectiveness of a program conducted by Refugee Family Services, which supports youth in managing stressors of resettlement. Refugee Family Services has served families resettled in metro Atlanta for over 20 years, with a mission of providing economic and educational opportunities for refugee women and children in order to promote self-sufficiency and successful resettlement (RFS., 2011). The organization's Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) aims to address the challenges associated with resettlement of female, refugee youth in particular by strengthening skills needed to achieve self-sufficiency and well-being.

The YWLP started in September 2012 with a $20,000 grant from the Atlanta

Women's Foundation (RFS., 2013a). In its first year, the program served fifteen, high school-aged, female refugees. The YWLP has four main objectives: (1) to support participants' emotional and behavioral development, (2) to support participants' social and cultural development, (3) to increase participants' commitment to learning and (4) to increase participants' ability to achieve self-sufficiency (Dennis, 2013d). The program uses the following approaches to achieve these objectives: applied learning in the community; monthly, one-on-one meetings with adult mentors; and workshops on health awareness, financial literacy and professional and personal development in a supportive, peer environment (RFS., 2013a). Life skills training is incorporated into each of these approaches and includes financial management, goal setting, leadership, teamwork, communication skills, job readiness and healthy lifestyle practices. Through cultivating this skill set among its participants, the YWLP aims to enable female refugee youth to access basic resources, handle the stressors of adapting to a new environment and establish social connections that promote well-being and successful resettlement. This program is of particular interest due to its unique approach of combining multiple strategies to address the complex web of challenges affecting adolescent refugees during resettlement.

After one year of implementing the YWLP, gaps in knowledge regarding program performance exist. Refugee Family Services wanted to address the following questions related to the YWLP's performance:

1. To what extent is the YWLP making progress toward its objectives?

2. How can the YWLP improve its efforts to meet its objectives?

3. How can program staff track progress of the YWLP more accurately?

The goal of this special studies project is to help strengthen Refugee Family Service's ability to determine the effectiveness and areas for improvement of the YWLP. In order to realize this goal, the project aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Compile and analyze secondary data to determine program strengths and weaknesses

2. Contextualize findings through key informant interviews, a review of program documents and observations of program activities

3. Identify areas for improvement and additional strategies for measuring the program's outcomes

By systematically tracking progress of the YWLP, Refugee Family Services aims to identify areas in which they can strengthen their efforts to improve participants' social support and ability to manage stressors in resettlement.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are frequently referenced in order to explain the context and process through which this special studies project was conducted. To ensure consistency in terminology, standard definitions have been provided.

- *Formative Evaluation* is an assessment strategy that applies both qualitative and quantitative methods to identify factors influencing a program's effectiveness and progress during the implementation phase. Findings are then used to inform program improvements (Stetler et al., 2006).

- *Monitoring* involves ongoing data collection and analysis on specific indicators throughout program implementation. These data can inform program adjustments during the implementation phase and program evaluation efforts. Monitoring activities may include observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and assessments of knowledge, skills and attitudes among other ongoing data collection methods (Shah, Kambou, Goparaju, Adams, & Matarazzo, 2004).

- *Mentoring,* in the context of the Young Women's Leadership Program, involves monthly, one-on-one meetings, in which female adults provide academic, professional, social and emotional support to program participants in a safe environment (RFS., 2013a).

- *Refugee* is one who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result

of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UN

General Assembly, 1951, p. 137).

- *Resettlement* is the "selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have

  sought protection to a third State which has agreed to accept them as permanent

  residents." The status of permanent residence protects refugees from deportation and

  entitles them to the same rights as other legal residents of the country of resettlement.

  Resettlement also offers the opportunity for eventual naturalization in the third

  country (UNHCR, 2011, p. 9).

- *Triangulation* is the use of multiple methods, such as qualitative and quantitative

  methods, to crosscheck results and provide a holistic picture of an issue being studied

  (Jick, 1979).

- *Well-being* is a positive outcome describing one's ability to function and one's

  perception that his or her life is going well. This term incorporates both physical and

  mental health. Various disciplines have identified different dimensions of well-being,

  including physical, social, emotional, and psychological among others. (CDC, 2013)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature presents information on the monitoring and evaluation strategies that are relevant to the Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) and factors associated with adjustment and well-being in refugee resettlement approaches to youth development. By describing what factors impact refugee well-being during resettlement, how similar programs address these factors among youth and how other studies measure changes in these factors, this review provides a context for identifying areas of improvement within the YWLP and additional strategies for measuring outcomes of well-being among its program participants.

Approaches to Monitoring and Evaluation

Within the field of monitoring and evaluation, there are two classifications of evaluations: summative evaluations and formative evaluations. Saunders et al. describe formative evaluations as a way to "monitor and document program implementation and can aid in understanding the relationship between specific program elements and program outcomes" (2005, p. 134). In this way, formative evaluations can identify the reasons why a program is or is not successful in its efforts. These findings can then inform improvements and adaptations for future cycles of a program. In contrast, summative evaluations aim to measure whether or not a program has achieved its intended objectives. Such evaluations focus more on the end results rather than the process. Because this special studies project examines short-term outcomes to identify areas for improvement in the second year of the YWLP's implementation, a formative evaluation was conducted.

Stetler et al. further classify formative evaluations into four stages—developmental, implementation-focused, progress-focused and interpretive (2006). The developmental stage of formative evaluations occurs during the early implementation phase of the project or program. This stage collects information on the estimated gap between ideal and actual implementation, reasons for this implementation gap, barriers to achieving the ideal practice and feasibility of implementing changes to close the gap.

Implementation-focused evaluation puts additional emphasis on the current status of program implementation. This stage specifically examines the program's fidelity, the extent to which participants are exposed to each program component and the overall intensity of the program's exposure among its participants. These findings can inform program modifications and facilitate future interpretation of program results.

Like developmental and implementation-focused evaluations, progress-focused evaluations still occur during the implementation phase, but aim to measure intermediate outcomes to determine progress toward the program goals. Findings from progress evaluations can be used to optimize impact by addressing identified barriers and further strengthening factors that promote progress.

Interpretive evaluation is useful at later phases of program implementation, in which further information is needed to explain program results. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied in all of these stages to identify factors both external and internal to the program that impact effectiveness and progress toward intended outcomes. As this special studies project aimed to determine the YWLP's progress after one year of implementation, identify barriers and facilitators to implementation and make

recommendations for adjustments to the next implementation cycle, a progress-focused evaluation measuring intermediate outcomes was the most applicable design.

When evaluating the progress made during program implementation, triangulation is a specific strategy that can used to increase the validity of findings and provide a more holistic view of the program's impact. Multiple methods are applied in order to corroborate results and address the limitations that a singular method would present when used in isolation. Jick classifies triangulation as "within method" and "between method" (Jick, 1979, p. 602). "Between method" triangulation uses distinctive methods, such as both qualitative and quantitative, to examine the same research question. Concurrent results increase certainty of the answer to the research question (Jick, 1979, p. 602).

In contrast to "between method" triangulation, a "within method" approach applies various techniques within the same method, such as the use of multiple surveys with different scales (Jick, 1979, pp. 602-603). This approach is primarily used to check the internal validity of a given method. In evaluating the progress of the YWLP, a "between method" triangulation approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods was applied in order to provide a holistic view of progress made and barriers to fully achieving program objectives.

Adjustment and Well-being in Resettlement

Factors external to a program have the potential to influence the effectiveness of efforts to support refugees in the resettlement process. Evidence in the literature points to important social and economic factors that hinder or facilitate adaptation, integration and achievement of well-being in resettlement (Beiser, 2009; Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; Khuwaja et al., 2013).

One of the largest and longest studies of refugee resettlement to date (1979 -1991) examined challenges and facilitators of integration and factors associated with mental health outcomes among Southeast Asian refugees resettled in Canada (Beiser, 2009). Successfully integrated refugees were found to have lower levels of depression, lower rates of welfare enrollment, higher quality family relationships and stronger English language skills. In contrast, lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, limited language ability, pre-migration trauma, and limited social support, were negatively associated with perceptions of well-being among refugees (Beiser, 2009). Furthermore, long-term relationships throughout the different stages of resettlement positively impacted measures of well-being. These findings suggest that, in addition to providing English language and employment services, social support and management of pre-migration trauma should be key considerations for programs supporting refugees in resettlement.

Similar to the experience of refugees in general, refugee youth in particular face social stressors in school and home environments that can influence their sense of psychological and social well-being during resettlement (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). A study that focused specifically on refugee youth examined the link between school, family and broader social environments on refugee's subjective sense of health and well-being. Researchers collected information on self-identity, social connectedness, life goals and perceptions of health and four domains of well-being as measured by the World Health Organization's Quality of Life questionnaire (WHO, 1996). In concert with Beiser's findings (2009), this study also demonstrated that familial and larger social contexts were associated with refugees' sense of well-being. In particular, unsafe home

environments, single parent households, discrimination, bullying at school and perceived low social status in the broader community were key challenges among refugee youth that resulted in lower, self-reported measures of psychological and social well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). The authors posited that these perceived challenges impacted refugees' well-being by decreasing their sense of belonging in multiple social contexts. Consequently, social support in the context of the home, school and broader community is important to consider when providing services to resettled refugee youth.

While a study by Kia-Keating & Ellis also examined factors affecting resettlement of refugee youth, the authors focused more specifically on the school environment with regards to psychological and social adjustment among resettled, Somali youth (2007). Using a questionnaire that measured depression, post traumatic stress disorder, sense of school membership, school participation, exposure to war trauma and perceived self-efficacy, researchers explored correlations between variables of interest. Consistent with Correa-Velez et al.'s finding that peers' social acceptance was related to youth's psychological and social well-being (2010), Kia-Keeting & Ellis more precisely identified that a sense of belonging within the school environment was associated with lower levels of depression and greater feelings of self-efficacy among study participants (2007). As such, increasing refugee youth's ability to manage social conditions at school may help reduce their susceptibility to adverse mental health outcomes.

In addition, studies that examine the experience of immigrants not classified as refugees can also shed light on the facilitators and barriers to successful adjustment, integration and achievement of well-being. A qualitative study of adaptation among Pakistani, adolescent females, who recently immigrated to Texas, sought to identify the

most important factors impacting participants' "post-migration experiences" (Khuwaja et al., 2013, p. 315). Researchers interviewed participants on their experiences as immigrant youth in relation to home life, academics, friendships, challenges, coping strategies and awareness of resources available in the community. As in Beiser's study (2009), the respondents in this study also emphasized the language barrier as a major challenge in adapting and integrating into a new community (Khuwaja et al., 2013). Similar to Correa-Velez et al.'s finding that peer acceptance was associated with well-being (2010), peers played an important role in helping the young women in this study learn about different cultures in their new communities (Khuwaja et al., 2013). Furthermore, respondents expressed a "strong desire to contribute to community building" and a sense of satisfaction in volunteering because of the opportunities for socializing, leadership development and contributing to their community (Khuwaja et al., 2013, p. 320). This study builds on Correa-Velez et al.'s (2010) and Beiser's (2009) findings by providing an explanation for why social acceptance and connectedness may be important to individuals' well-being when adapting to a new community.

In considering the process of resettlement among refugees and refugee youth in particular, there is evidence in the literature of important factors that influence one's ability to integrate, adapt and achieve well-being. Several studies have found that key challenges may include difficulty finding employment, discrimination, language barriers, difficult family conditions and lack of social connectedness (Beiser, 2009; Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Khuwaja et al., 2013). Studies have also shown that facilitators of successful resettlement may include long-term relationships, social resources, connections with peers, feeling socially valued, strong academic performance, sense of school belonging

and the ability to engage with and contribute to the broader community (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Khuwaja et al., 2013; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). These external factors are important to consider when determining the effectiveness of programs supporting refugee youth as they adapt and integrate into a new community.

Youth Development Through Training, Application and Community Engagement

In addition to external influences, factors internal to a program can influence its level of effectiveness in promoting positive engagement of youth in the broader community. Evidence from the literature has demonstrated that youth development programs focused on training and application of life skills at the community level can positively impact their participants by increasing confidence in securing a job, improving social support and increasing self-efficacy (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009; Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003; Zedan, 2007). Factors that have been identified as contributing to the success of such programs include mutual partnerships between youth and adults; opportunities to take on leadership roles in the community; and activities that encouraged critical thinking (Berg et al., 2009; Cargo et al., 2003).

Programs that provide opportunities for youth to engage with communities and take ownership of projects have the potential to foster their leadership skills and social development. A qualitative study of Canadian youth enrolled in a participatory, community health promotion intervention examined how participation in the program impacted youth's development of life skills (Cargo et al., 2003). Data from interviews, focus groups and participant observations revealed that youth benefitted from mutual partnerships with the adults guiding the program. Youth were able to take control of issues affecting their quality of life, voice their opinions, participate in decision-making

processes and take action in their communities (Cargo et al., 2003). This empowerment process was linked to increased social integration into their communities. Consequently, participatory activities that allow youth to engage with their communities may enhance program efforts to promote social integration and leadership development.

In addition to engaging with communities and taking ownership of projects, gender dynamics may also play an important role in developing youths' leadership skills. A study of a program similar to Cargo et al.'s examined the effectiveness of efforts to mobilize and transfer skills to youth in addition to promoting gender empowerment (Zedan, 2007). Zedan et al.'s program, the Academy for Educational Development's Community Youth Mapping, exposed Egyptian youth to training and practice in community mobilization, community-based research, promotion of gender equity, teamwork and guidance from adults. Researchers interviewed a subset of young females in order to determine how the program impacted these participants. Consistent with Cargo et al.'s finding that youth were empowered to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making processes (2003), this study demonstrated that youth experienced increased assertiveness and social value through participating in the program (Zedan, 2007). Additionally, program activities were found to assist young women in better understanding their surrounding environment and identifying assets and social issues in their communities. Furthermore, the program's opportunities to develop and apply practical, technical skills increased participants' confidence in their ability to secure a job in the future. These findings suggest that youth programs promoting gender empowerment and community engagement have the potential to promote social and professional development among female adolescents.

Programs that allow youth to take action in the community can also increase their sense of purpose and motivation, both as individuals and as groups. An evaluation of a three-year summer and after-school program examined outcomes that resulted from training adolescents in community-based research, critical thinking and advocacy. Researchers collected data on participation in social action at the academic, community and policy levels as well as changes in attitudes and behaviors toward school and the broader community (Berg et al., 2009). Similar to Cargo et al.'s findings, Berg et al. demonstrated that youth enrolled in the program were more likely to take action in their communities (2009). Additionally, participants developed communication and critical thinking skills, which increased their self-efficacy and established a sense of direction in their lives (Berg et al., 2009). In contrast to the comparison group, program participants were also more able to embrace positive peer influences (Berg et al., 2009). While Zedan et al. found that youth increased their individual self-efficacy by participating in a similar program (2007), Berg et al. showed that program participants also developed a sense of "collective empowerment and self-efficacy in relation to social action" (2009, p. 356). Consequently, changes among the group in addition to the individual are important to keep in mind when measuring the impact of youth development programs.

In considering the design and objectives of youth development programs, these studies present several important factors and outcomes associated with youth programs that aim to develop life skills through training, application and community engagement. Mutual partnerships between youth and adults; opportunities to voice opinions, make decisions and take action; and inclusion of activities that foster critical thinking can further enhance to youth development efforts (Berg et al., 2009; Cargo et al., 2003).

Furthermore, these life skills programs have the potential to positively impact youth by improving social integration, increasing confidence in future job prospects, increasing self-efficacy, developing a sense of direction in life and increasing positive peer influences (Berg et al., 2009; Cargo et al., 2003; Zedan, 2007).

Mentoring

Previous research has examined the ways in which both formal and informal adult mentors impact youth development. Several studies have demonstrated that having a mentor can reduce youth's likelihood of engaging in high-risk behaviors and encourage social, emotional and academic development (Moody, Childs, & Sepples, 2003; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). Furthermore, the literature suggests that high quality mentor relationships are more likely to promote positive development of youth as compared to low-quality relationships (Zand et al., 2009). This research can provide a context for understanding how youth programs with adult mentoring components influence the well-being of their participants.

Presence of a mentor in a young person's life has the potential to promote positive behavioral development and discourage engagement in high-risk activities. A cross-sectional study of youth living in the Midwest examined the relationship between having a mentor and indicators of "adolescent resiliency," such as avoidance of drugs and positive attitudes about school (Zimmerman et al., 2002, p. 221). The researchers administered a questionnaire to 770 youth, gathering information on mentor relationships, attitudes toward school, involvement in drugs and other related practices. Adolescents with mentors were less likely to use drugs or engage in socially disruptive behaviors and more likely to have positive perceptions of school and high self-efficacy (Zimmerman et

al., 2002). This study did not measure quality of mentor relationships, which limited the ability to determine any differences among youth with more or less supportive mentors.

In contrast to Zimmerman et al.'s study, which did not take the quality of the mentor relationship into account, a study by Zand et al. developed a Mentor-Youth Alliance scale to determine the quality of the relationship from the mentee's perspective (2009). Using this scale, the authors examined the effect of mentorship quality on youth's relationships with family and adults, attitudes toward school and development of life skills (Zand et al., 2009). Findings showed that a higher quality relationship with a mentor was associated with increased development in life skills—including resistance to peer pressure, self-efficacy and aversion to drug use—as compared to lower quality relationships. As such, taking measures to ensure a high quality relationship may be important in youth programs with adult mentorship components.

In examining the potential effects of mentor relationships on youth development, the literature has demonstrated that having a mentor may decrease youth's likelihood of engaging in risky or socially disruptive behaviors and may improve attitudes toward school, self-confidence and ability to connect with others (Moody et al., 2003; Zimmerman et al., 2002). More specifically, Zand et al.'s study showed that a high quality mentor relationship was more likely to promote positive development of youth as compared to a lower-quality relationship (2009).

As presented in this review of the literature, there is evidence to suggest that social support, language proficiency, academic performance, ability to find employment and family environments are important factors influencing successful resettlement and well-being among refugees. In addition to these factors, programs that directly target

youth have identified positive peer influences, supportive relationships with adults, participation in decision-making, and community engagement as key factors that influence positive development and well-being among adolescents. Given this context, this special studies project applied formative evaluation strategies to identify areas of progress, implementation barriers and strategies for optimizing the YWLP's efforts to support youth in adjusting and integrating into their new communities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND RESULTS

Methods

To address the three main objectives of this special studies project, mixed methods triangulation approach was taken. Triangulation supports use of data from various sources to validate the findings. In addition to primary and secondary data, I conducted extensive desk review of the organizational reports and documents related to the Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) produced since its inception.

Primary data sources included a series of three key informant interviews and seven email correspondences with Refugee Family Services staff as well as observations of two workshops that the staff organized for its fifteen participants.

Secondary data were collected by Refugee Family Services staff during the first year of the YWLP's implementation (November 2012-May 2013). These secondary data sources included organizational documents, pre- and post-workshop assessments of participants' change in knowledge of workshop topics, an end-of-year focus group discussion with participants, written mentor feedback and pre- and post- internship evaluations completed by site supervisors.

Program Site

Refugee Family Services' office, where I conducted my project, was located in a shopping complex in the town of Stone Mountain, Georgia. This area was surrounded by a variety of ethnic restaurants and stores run by resettled refugees and immigrants. The two-story office space included a waiting room, cubicles, several meeting rooms and a small, day care center. Refugee Family Services provided the following services at its office: youth development programs, support for parents, literacy classes, financial

training, employment services, domestic violence prevention, health and safety education, support for advocacy and support for food security initiatives (RFS., 2011).

Refugee Family Services staff designed and implemented the YWLP, which provided the following activities for its participants during the 2012-2013 academic year: bi-monthly workshops on personal and professional development, health awareness and financial management; monthly, one-on-one meetings with female, adult mentors; six-week internships; six individual community service hours; and one group community service project. Bi-monthly workshops took place at Refugee Family Services' office. Mentor meetings occurred in a variety of locations in metro Atlanta, including the mentee's houses, parks and restaurants. Participants interned with Refugee Family Services as well as other organizations and businesses located in Clarkston and Stone Mountain. Volunteering and community projects took place in parks and other venues associated with non-profit organizations in metro Atlanta.

Program Population

In its first year, the YWLP served resettled refugee girls enrolled in 9th and 10th grade at DeKalb and Gwinnett county high schools. In its second year, the program expanded to include 11th and 12th grade students in order to provide support applying to jobs and post-secondary education. Selection was an informal process, in which other refugee clients and Refugee Family Services staff identified and referred participants to the program. During the first year of implementation, the program enrolled 15 refugees, originating from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and Central Africa.

Observations

 To better understand the context of the program's workshops, I conducted unstructured observations during the first two bi-monthly workshops of the 2013-2014 academic year. The first session focused on establishing healthy relationships and the second covered the media's effects on self-image. The duration of the workshops were 75 minutes each. During these unstructured observations, I took notes on participants' attentiveness, participation levels, interactions with other peers and ability to communicate in small and large group settings.

Key Informant Interviews and Correspondence

 Through a series of key informant interviews and email exchanges with the program coordinator, I gathered information on the history and context of the YWLP, plans for the coming year and program needs for data analysis, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. I also corresponded with an assisting staff member, who designed the focus group discussion guide for participants and facilitated the discussion at the end of the first year. Through these conversations, I gathered information on the focus group process, including the overall objective, discussion guide formulation, discussion duration and the environment in which the discussion took place.

Secondary Data

 I reviewed organizational and programmatic documents from Refugee Family Services in order to gain a better understanding of the YWLP's context and history. Documents reviewed included YWLP Statement of Program Needs, Refugee Family Services Annual Report 2013, Refugee Family Services Strategic Plan, the Development Assets framework used by Refugee Family Services for its youth programs, the YWLP

Flow Chart and workshop agendas (Dennis, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d; RFS., 2011, 2013a, 2013b). These documents provided information on program's objectives, components, schedule of events and position within the larger organizational framework.

In order to determine strengths and areas for improvement with the program, I completed secondary analysis of evaluation data and administrative data collected by the program staff during the first year of implementation. Routine administrative data included workshop attendance, community service hours and written mentor feedback from monthly reports. Data collected specifically for the purposes of program evaluation included pre/post workshop assessments, pre/post internship assessments and an end-of-year focus group discussion with program participants.

Program staff designed questions for pre- and post-workshop assessments in order to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes towards topics and skills covered during the workshops. Questions asked participants to self-rate their knowledge and attitudes about financial literacy, career development, academic development, nutrition, self-esteem and self-defense strategies. An example of a self-rated knowledge question was, "I know how to defend myself against an attacker." One example of an attitude-based question was "I believe it's important to save money." Assessment included Likert ratings from 1 to 3, 1 to 4, or 1 to 5. The program coordinator distributed assessments to the participants at the beginning and end of each workshop.

Program staff conducted a participant focus group at the end of the year to receive feedback on the program. The questions asked about participants' perceived benefits of the program, personal goals set during the program, suggestions for improving the program and perceptions of leadership, self-sufficiency and self-confidence. The focus

group discussion had 12 participants and lasted one hour. The discussion was recorded and later transcribed.

8 of 15 girls participated in six-week internships with local organizations and businesses with the intent of developing job skills. The program coordinator administered pre- and post-internship evaluations to each site supervisor. These evaluations included a scoring of professional behaviors and a job performance. The evaluations utilized both Likert scale ratings and open-ended questions. For professional behaviors, internship supervisors ranked participants on a scale of 1 to 4 on 6 criteria at the start and end of the internship period. The criteria included measures, such as *attendance and punctuality, ability to follow instructions* and *ability to be a productive team member.* For job performance, site supervisors ranked participants on a scale of 1 to 5 for qualities including, *punctuality, cooperation, dependability* and *ability to follow instructions*.

Participants were each assigned a female, adult mentor with whom they met on a monthly basis. Mentors provided social, academic, professional and emotional support to their mentees. Mentors were requested to log their activities and reflect on their relationships with their mentees through a monthly, online survey. Survey questions were open-ended and asked about details of the interaction, successes and challenges experienced, perceived benefits of the interaction and observations of the mentee's improvement. The program coordinator also solicited feedback from the mentors at the end of the year, using an online survey with open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

I conducted qualitative, thematic analysis of de-identified data from focus group discussion, interviews and written, mentor feedback. This process involved reading

through text, identifying themes that emerged and grouping responses by themes. For the workshop and internship assessments, I summed Likert ratings for each category to calculate an overall Likert scale variable for each theme (e.g. financial literacy, nutrition, self-defense, job performance). I used the paired t-test in SAS 9.3 to determine statistical significance ($\alpha=0.05$) of changes in pre/post scale variables for each workshop and internship assessment.

Ethical Considerations

Before initiating this special studies project, I consulted with Emory University's Institutional Review Board to determine whether or not the project was considered human subjects research. Because the secondary data was de-identified and because the primary intent of the project was to inform program improvements, the Institutional Review Board determined that the project did not qualify as human subjects research.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the data collection process that may have introduced bias. Due to inconsistent attendance at workshops and variable participation in internships and volunteer activities, staff members were unable to collect outcome data on all 15 participants at all events offered by the program. The small number of participants in attendance, especially for internships, limited the ability to detect significant changes in pre/post assessment scores.

Another limitation in the data collection process related to the design of the workshop assessments. Almost all knowledge assessment questions relied on self-reported levels of understanding. These self-reported measures may have been subject to social desirability bias, in which participants respond based on what they perceive to be

the most socially desirable answer rather than what they truly believe. This bias could have inflated both the pre- and post-assessment scores, leading to a smaller observed change. Questions that objectively measure knowledge may have more accurately detected changes in knowledge from pre- to post-workshop.

Because I was not involved in the initial data collection process, I did not have the ability to address these limitations in the early stages of the evaluation. However, several workshop assessments still showed significant increases in pre/post scores. In addition, I aimed to address the issue of bias by triangulating workshop assessment data with qualitative data from focus group discussions and written mentor feedback. Though focus group and mentor comments did not provide quantifiable changes in knowledge and attitudes of program focus areas, these data were able to identify perceived improvements from both the mentors' and participants' perspectives.

Findings

The Young Women's Leadership (YWLP) aimed to address four objectives through its program activities, including (1) supporting participants' emotional and behavioral development, (2) social and cultural development, (3) commitment to learning and (4) ability to achieve self-sufficiency. Within each of these four objectives, there was an established set of intended outcomes as listed in the program's flow chart (Dennis, 2013d). Based on a review of program documents, 6 of the 14 intended outcomes had specific indicators by which to measure progress, while 8 did not. Findings demonstrate that participants experienced improvements in outcomes within each of the four objective areas, but also faced barriers related to social and economic stressors not fully addressed through the program. A summary of these findings in relation to the program's objectives and intended outcomes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Findings Mapped to the Young Women's Leadership Program's Objectives and Intended Outcomes

Objectives	Intended Outcomes	Indicators	Findings
1. Support participants' emotional and behavioral development	a. Improved emotional health b. Increased self- confidence c. Ability to establish supportive, violence-free relationships	a. No specific indicator b. No specific indicator c. No specific indicator	a/b. 5 of 14 mentors reported improvements in mentees' emotional health and provided examples of increased self-esteem, self-confidence and ability to express emotions. c. Mentor feedback and focus group discussion included comments on increased self-confidence and supportive relationships established.
2. Support participants' social and cultural development	a. Decreased social barriers b. Increased community engagement c. Increased sense of leadership	a. No specific indicator b. ≥6 hours of community service / participant c. No specific indicator	a. Mentor feedback described improvements in mentees' comfort levels when exposed to unfamiliar settings and social situations. b. Participants collectively completed 94 community service hours at 3 different service events (average of 6 hours/participant). c. Focus group discussion comments identified increased self-confidence, communication skills and social skills as avenues through which the program developed their capacity to lead.
3. Increase participants' commitment to learning	a. Improved academic engagement b. Increased graduation rates c. Increased enrollment in college	a. No specific indicator b. # of participants graduating high school post-program specific indicator c. # of participants enrolled in college post-program	a. Mentor feedback and focus group comments described participants' improvements in academic performance and motivation to learn. 4 of 14 mentors reported improvements in mentees' commitment to learning. b/c. Graduation rates and enrollment in college were not yet measured, as participants were in 9th and 10th grades.
4. Increase participants' ability to achieve self-sufficiency	a. Increased financial literacy b. Increased job readiness c. Increased ability to proactively set goals d. Increased ability to make safe, responsible decisions e. Increased knowledge of healthy behaviors	a. Increase in Financial Management workshop assessment scores b. Increase in internship evaluation scores c. No specific indicator d. No specific indicator e. Increase in Health Awareness workshop assessment scores	a. A significant increase was demonstrated in pre/post assessment scores for Financial Management workshop (p<0.01). b. A significant increase was demonstrated in job performance scores (p=0.02) from pre/post internship evaluations. c. 7 of 14 mentors reported setting goals with their mentees and 2 mentors reported their mentees as already having goals. d. No data e. A significant increase was demonstrated in pre/post assessment scores for Health Awareness workshop (self defense: p<0.01, nutrition: p<0.01).

Emotional and Behavioral Development

Findings of this formative evaluation demonstrate an increase in participants' self-esteem, self-confidence and engagement in supportive relationships through interactions with their assigned female, adult mentors. Mentors were requested to meet with their mentees on a monthly basis and submit written reports regarding the details of each interaction. Most mentors were able to meet with their mentees on a monthly basis, starting in early January and ending in early May of 2013. Several mentors also communicated via phone calls, texts or emails in between monthly meetings. Meetings involved a variety of activities, including visits to museums, shopping, community service, goal setting, and homework help. Mentors provided qualitative, written feedback about their meetings in a total of 42 reports, which were analyzed to identify progress toward the program's objectives and potential barriers to fully achieving these objectives.

As shown in Table 1, 5 of 14 mentors reported improvements in mentees' emotional health. A general pattern emerged that, as mentees spent more time engaging in enjoyable activities with their mentors, they expressed positive emotions and increased satisfaction. One mentor initially described her mentee as "very quiet" but noted during the second meeting, "she began to smile and her body language was more open." In a subsequent meeting, the mentor described their interaction as "probably one of the best times we've had and definitely the time we laughed to together the most." This series of comments illustrates the mentees' progression from being initially reserved to being comfortable and expressing enjoyment from interacting with her mentor. In addition to expressing positive emotions in response to enjoyable activities with mentors, mentees also responded positively to goal setting activities. One mentor explained that, "through

[creating] a vision board, [the mentee] was able to express her hopes, dreams and goals…Going through the process made her excited and hopeful about accomplishing these goals." This account demonstrates how the mentee's increased enthusiasm and motivation to succeed resulted from setting goals with the mentor.

Several mentors provided examples of establishing supportive relationships with their mentees. Descriptions illustrate how mentors filled key roles as supportive adults who provided encouragement and a sense of trust. One mentor illustrated this point, describing how she hoped the mentee "feels that she can trust me and knows I will do what I can to help her to be successful." In a later interaction, the same mentor wrote about her mentee reaching out to her during a difficult time. The mentor reflected, "Although [the mentee] is upset, it's good that she's able to talk about it." According to this mentor's description, establishment of a trusting and supportive relationship allowed the mentee to feel comfortable discussing her problems and seeking emotional support from her mentor.

In addition to mentors' observations, youth participants were able to identify aspects of the program that positively impacted their self-confidence and self-awareness. In the end-of-year focus group, one participant highlighted the benefits she experienced from interacting with program staff by explaining, "When I did the art project, I didn't know what to do but [the program staff member] encouraged me, *you can do it*. She just made me believe in myself." Through positive interactions with staff member, this participant perceived improvements in her self-confidence. Another participant was able to observe an improvement in her self-awareness through her involvement in the program. As she explained, "I think this program got me to get to know myself better,

because now I know what I'm good at and what I'm bad at." This participant became more aware of her strengths and weaknesses over time through engaging in program activities.

While mentor reports and focus group responses illustrate improvements in participants' emotional development, several of the mentors' comments also highlight important social and household economic stressors that caused stress and anxiety in their mentees' lives. As one mentor noted, "[My mentee] had a bit of a break down at this last meeting. She got very upset and says that her life has not improved since moving to America. She feels that she is alone and can't count on many people. She mentioned specific things – like their food stamps and Medicaid not being renewed, as well as her mom still not getting English training, which leads them to not having any source of income. She also is worried that, because her housing is only guaranteed for 6 months, she will have to move again and will continue to have to adjust to new schools and fall behind in work." This account demonstrates the challenges this mentee and her family faced in meeting their basic needs and the concerns this mentee had in response to her household economic stressors.

The same mentor further described how these challenges affected her mentee's psychological and emotional state: "I am concerned about [the mentee's] situation with her family. The fact that her mother is unable to work and that there is so much uncertainty around if/when/where they are moving is causing [the mentee] a significant amount of stress. I know this is impacting her negatively as she loses sleep due to the stress. I'm also concerned she might have a bit of PTSD. We talk frequently, so I will keep in eye on all of this and update [the program staff] as needed…[the mentee] has also

opened up to me more about her experiences over lunch. I can tell that she really appreciates having someone to talk to about the traumatic events she's experienced." As illustrated through this account, the mentee was perceived as experiencing adverse emotional and psychological outcomes due to her family's stressful situation in addition to potentially traumatic, pre-migration events.

Social and Cultural Development

Several mentors initially reported challenges with getting their mentees to open up, but later described improvements in their mentees' ability to interact and communicate. As one mentor described, "This particular meeting felt very successful, because we were very comfortable in each other's presence and she was more candid with me than she has been in the past." This account demonstrates that the mentee improved in her social interactions and felt more comfortable with the mentor in comparison to previous sessions. Similar to this description, another mentor reported improvements in her mentee's comfort level with engaging in conversation. The mentor wrote, "[The mentee] is starting to open up just a little (just a little) and it's small, but she initiated conversation while we were at [a museum]. That's probably the first time she's said something that was not in direct response to something I've said." As noted in this mentor's account, the mentee showed improvements by demonstrating that she was comfortable enough in this social situation to communicate without being prompted.

In addition to mentor's descriptions of improved social and communication skills, end-of-year focus group discussion comments illustrate how the YWLP fostered leadership skills among participants as an outcome under the program's objective of social and cultural development. In reflecting on how YWLP enhanced their ability to be

leaders, participants responded that the program helped them "get along with people [they had] never met," fostered "better social skills," helped them with "public speaking" and improved their "teamwork" skills. Another participant further explained, "The program is, I guess, leadership but it was getting to know yourself…before you become a leader you have to be confident within yourself so they help bring your self-esteem higher … We always talk about stuff like don't worry about your appearance and…you're always different from everybody else and I guess getting to know yourself like loving yourself and when you get to the point where you accept that then you can become a leader." These comments demonstrate that participants perceived the program as fostering leadership skills through promoting self-esteem and development of other relevant life skills.

While findings from mentor reports and the focus group highlight improvements in social development, participants still faced unmet needs related to social stressors, communication skills and levels of engagement in their communities. With regards to community engagement, several focus group participants expressed a desire for additional application of skills through service activities, internship opportunities and leadership activities in the community. Suggestions, such as "we should do more community service," "more options for internships" and "the chance to interact with people," were mentioned as ways of improving the program. One participant elaborated, "This program is more of a women's group instead of a leadership program because we aren't really leading people. We're just getting to know ourselves." These comments indicate that, while participants recognized improvements in development of life skills

and self-awareness, the application of skills within the broader community context was lacking.

In addition to opportunities for community engagement, participants also demonstrated a need for improvement in communication skills relating to their social interactions with others. Based on two unstructured observations of bi-monthly workshops, 4 to 5 participants consistently volunteered to speak or present during large group discussions, indicating that these individuals were confident in their ability to communicate and were confortable sharing their thoughts with others. However, the 7 remaining participants did not express their thoughts and ideas as frequently. Several of these participants appeared to be less fluent in English as compared to participants who regularly spoke, suggesting that language barriers remain a challenge for some. Consistent with these observations, several mentors reported language barriers and low self-esteem as challenges to mentees' successful communication and interaction in social settings.

Aside from the communication skills and engagement in the broader community, findings also demonstrate that managing social stressors was another barrier to achieving the objective of social development. As one mentor described, "[my mentee] is a happy person and I do not think she has a lot of challenges, but I do think that she fears that her future will not be hers if she does not become independent very soon. She is afraid she too will be forced to marry and not get to be a single woman enjoying life." This account demonstrates how family pressures may have created a sense of concern or anxiety for the mentee. In addition to family pressures, focus group participants also mentioned needing additional support to overcome other social stressors they encountered. When

asked about potential program improvements, participants responded, "We need stuff for high school. Like how to deal with peer pressure, drugs and dating…Yes…like domestic abuse too." This comment highlights the fact that participants had unmet needs with regards to managing social stressors encountered in settings outside the program environment.

Commitment to Learning

Several mentors reported providing academic support and encouragement to their mentors and 4 of 14 mentors noted improvements in mentees' commitment to learning. Most mentors provided homework help to their mentees and reported observing improvements in their mentees' interest in learning and academic performance after several meetings. As one mentor described, her mentor "excitedly texted me on Monday to tell me that she got a 100% on her quiz we studied for together. This was great news as she'd previously been getting D's-C's on her quizzes. [She] seems to actually want to learn now…[and] is interested in understanding the material." This comment illustrates that, as a result of studying with the mentor, the mentee improved her academic performance. Another mentor wrote about a positive experience tutoring her mentee: "[We] practiced Math for 4 hours. It was difficult but we both put our minds to it and she feels more confident now. She said she learned a lot and that she understands it better. She now knows that she just has to practice everyday." As described in this account, the mentor facilitated academic time with her mentee. As a result, she perceived the mentee as experiencing greater confidence and understanding of the material.

During the end-of-year focus group, several participants provided comments that demonstrated a commitment to learning. One participant discussed academics in the

context of her relationship with her mentor, stating, "My mentor has been helpful, because she is always encouraging me to do good in school, and she's giving me tips on what she did in college." The same participant stated that "[My mentor] signed me up for a public speaking class and she was very helpful." This participant's comments show that her mentors' support positively influenced her academic life.

Participants also demonstrated a commitment to learning through responses to questions about self-sufficiency in the end-of-year focus group discussion. When asked about their perceptions of self-sufficiency in relation to graduating high school, several participants responded that entering or graduating from college were stages at which they would feel more self-sufficient as compared to only graduating from high school. One participant expressed the following about graduating college: "I think I will be more self-sufficient when I graduate college, because during college, you're still trying to figure out what you want." This comment illustrates that participants valued post-secondary education as an important avenue for achieving self-sufficiency.

Ability to Achieve Self-sufficiency

In addition to monthly mentor meetings, participants attended quarterly workshops at the Refugee Family Services office. These workshops aimed to develop participants' life skills in a supportive, peer environment. Workshop topics included health awareness, financial literacy, career/academic development and self-esteem. Assessments were administered at the beginning and end of each workshop in order to measure changes in knowledge and attitudes related to workshop themes.

A summary of workshop outcomes is presented in Table 2. Attendance was variable, with as many as 4 of 15 participants missing from each workshop. 12 of 15

participants attended the Health Awareness workshop, which covered topics of self-defense and nutrition. Significant increases were observed in both nutrition (t=3.24, p<0.01) and self-defense scale variables (t=3.75, p<0.01). 12 of 15 participants attended the Financial Literacy Workshop, which covered topics of savings, credit and budgets. There was a statistically significant increase in scores (t=4.32, p<0.01).

Table 2. Summary of Internship Evaluation and Workshop Assessment Scores of Young Women's Leadership Program Participants (2012-2013)*

Data Source	Scale Variable (possible range)	N[†]	Mean Pre-Test Score	Mean Post-Test Score	Mean Change
Internship Evaluation	Professionalism (6-24)	7	17	17	0
Internship Evaluation	Job Performance (17-85)	7	62	80	18[‡]
Financial Literacy Workshop Assessment	Financial Literacy (16-80)	12	54	64	10[‡]
Health Awareness Workshop Assessment	Self-Defense (9-27)	12	19	23	4[‡]
Health Awareness Workshop Assessment	Nutrition (7-21)	12	16	18	2[‡]
Academic/Career Workshop Assessment	Career Development (16-48)	11	42	44	2
Self Esteem Workshop Assessment	Self-esteem (6-18)	11	15	16	1

*Data were collected by Refugee Family Services staff from November 2012-May 2013
†N= number of respondents
‡Statistically Significant at α= 0.05

In addition to attending monthly mentor meetings and quarterly workshops, 8 of 15 participants were enrolled in six-week internships with local organizations. Internship site supervisors completed pre/post surveys that evaluated participants on their job performance and professional behaviors. Supervisors completed performance evaluations of the interns, ranking them on a scale of 1 to 5 for job performance criteria. As one of these participants dropped out of her internship part way through the program, pre/post internship data were analyzed for 7 participants. Participants' scores on the job performance scale variable showed a significant increase (t=3.31, p=0.02).

Feedback from mentor reports also demonstrates improvements in participants' outcomes under the program's objective of promoting self-sufficiency. Most mentors

reported providing academic support and professional development to mentees in order increase skills that promote their ability to achieve self-sufficiency. As one mentor described, "[My mentee] and I worked on getting a résumé together for her, discussed possible employment opportunities. She is doing well in school and needs information on writing essays, which I will provide next time I see her…She now has a résumé she can present to potential employers." This mentor's account illustrates specific professional development activities that the mentor worked on with her mentee.

In addition, 7 of 14 mentors also focused on setting professional, academic and personal goals with their mentees. As one mentor reported, "[My mentee] is very much focused on academics. A recurring theme in our discussions is how she wants to go to [college], get a good job and support her family. We decided, after going through all possible options, to focus on one academic goal." This comment demonstrates that, through guiding the mentee to focus on a specific goal, the mentor supported her in moving toward her long-term vision of achieving self-sufficiency for herself and her family.

Summary

Findings from this formative evaluation identify over half of the program's intended outcomes as not having established indicators by which to measure progress. Nevertheless, focus group and mentor feedback illustrate that mentors and program staff provided trusting, supportive relationships and promoted self-confidence and self-awareness among participants. Other reported forms of progress include increased ability to communicate in social situations, increased sense of leadership skills and increased motivation to learn. Pre/post assessments demonstrate improvements in scores measuring

financial literacy, job performance and knowledge of self-defense and nutrition. Identified challenges and barriers to further progress include inconsistent attendance and participation in workshops and internships, household economic stressors, pre-migration trauma, peer pressure at school and lack of opportunities for practical application of leadership and professional skills in the community.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION, PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion and Public Health Implications

Findings of this formative evaluation indicate that the Young Women's Leadership Program's (YWLP) mentorship, workshop and internship components advanced the program's four objectives after one year of implementation. Focus group and mentor feedback suggest that mentors and program staff provided trusting, supportive relationships and promoted self-confidence and self-awareness among participants. Findings also indicate that mentors and workshops fostered participants' communication and leadership skills. Pre/post workshop and internship assessments demonstrate improvements in participants' financial literacy, job performance and knowledge of self-defense and nutrition.

However, findings also highlight participants' need for further support, particularly within the objectives of social and emotional development. In addition, several of the program's intended outcomes referenced from the YWLP's flow chart are not clearly defined or lack specific indicators, presenting challenges in measuring progress within each of the four objectives (Dennis, 2013d). I will discuss the each of the four objectives and their implications one by one.

The first objective of supporting emotional and behavioral development included the following three intended outcomes: (1a) improved emotional health, (1b) increased self-confidence and (1c) ability to establish supportive relationships. While the program did not establish specific indicators to measure these three outcomes, findings from the mentor reports and focus group discussion suggest that participants experienced improvements in their self-esteem, self-confidence, ability to appropriately express

emotions and ability to engage in supportive relationships. These improvements were attributed to participation in mentorships and workshops and were demonstrated through qualitative descriptions as opposed to any quantifiably measurable changes.

Despite observed improvements, mentor and focus group comments highlight participants' need for additional support in managing stress. Challenges with pre-migration trauma, peer pressure, drugs and domestic abuse were specifically mentioned as causes of concern, stress or anxiety among participants. Traumatic pre-migration experiences, social stressors, and lack of coping strategies have been shown to increase mental health risk among resettled refugees (Beiser, 2009), and the prevalence of mental health disability is estimated to be as high as 11% among refugees resettled in DeKalb County, Georgia (Egner, 2011). Subsequently, poor management of stress and anxiety is an important barrier that can prevent refugee youth from fully achieving emotional and psychological well-being in the resettlement process.

The program's second objective of supporting social and cultural development had the following intended outcomes: (2a) decreased social barriers, (2b) increased community engagement and (2c) increased sense of leadership. Outcome 2a did not have specific indicator; however mentor feedback described improvements in mentees' ability to communicate and feel comfortable when exposed to unfamiliar settings and social situations. These reported improvements may help reduce barriers to effective social interaction. Focus group responses regarding perceptions of leadership and benefits of the program also suggest that participants experienced increased leadership skills due to participating in workshops. While findings highlight improvements in social development, mentor feedback and workshop observations also indicate that language

barriers and low self-confidence impeded some participants' ability to effectively communicate in social situations. As language fluency has been shown to influence social integration and mental health outcomes among resettled refugees, failure to address this challenge may have adverse consequences for participants' social development and mental health (Beiser, 2009).

The program's third objective of increasing commitment to learning included the intended outcomes of (3a) improved academic engagement, (3b) increased graduation rates and (3c) increased enrollment in college. Though no indicator was assigned to outcome 3a, mentor feedback and focus group comments indicate that participants improved their academic performance and motivation to learn. These improvements were attributed to mentor support in the way of tutoring and provision of other academic resources to mentees.

However, mentors and participants also voiced a need for additional academic support, particularly in the area of written English. One mentor wrote that difficulty with written English was the primary barrier keeping her mentee from achieving her full academic potential. Furthermore, academic performance has implications for one's likelihood of entering college and finding employment in the future. As individuals with college degrees have higher rates of employment and higher earnings than individuals without a degree, academic performance has the potential to impact employability, income and access to basic resources that promote and protect health (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Phelan, Link, Diez-Roux, Kawachi, & Levin, 2004). As such, supporting participants in achieving their full academic potential can have important implications for their ability to achieve self-sufficiency and access health services later on in life.

Objective 4, increase ability to achieve self-sufficiency, had five intended outcomes, including (4a) increased financial literacy, (4b) increased job readiness, (4c) increased ability to proactively set goals, (4d) increased ability to make safe, responsible decisions and (4e) increased knowledge of healthy behaviors. Significant increases in pre/post workshop and internship assessments scores indicate improvements in participants' financial literacy and job readiness. Focus group responses also suggest that most participants set personal, professional or academic goals during the course of the program. The significant increase in pre/post nutrition and self-defense scores suggest that participants increased their knowledge of healthy behaviors through attending the workshop. These demonstrated increases in financial literacy, job readiness and health awareness support the development of life skills that are important for achieving self-sufficiency.

While findings indicate improvements in outcomes related to self-sufficiency, focus group and mentor comments also suggest that participants experienced anxiety related to household economic stressors, such as parents' ability to find employment, unstable housing situations and lack of access to health insurance. Studies have shown that economic stressors can increase resettled refugees' risk of adverse mental health outcomes (Beiser, 2009). Moreover, limited access to health coverage can reduce health-seeking behaviors and negatively impact a broad range of health outcomes (Finkelstein et al., 2011). Consequently, participants' challenges with economic stressors may put them at increased risk of adverse health outcomes if such stressors go unaddressed.

In addition to programmatic areas that did not fully address participants' needs, limitations exist with regards to data collection and outcome measurement. Lack of

precise definitions for outcomes and indicators posed challenges in determining the extent to which the program advanced its' four objectives. In particular, broad terminology was an issue for the intended outcomes of (1a) improved emotional health, (2a) decreased social barriers, (2b) increased community engagement and (3a) improved academic engagement. Because terms like *emotional health* or *community engagement* can be defined in many different ways, interpreting data and measuring improvements related to these outcomes proved to be a challenge. Additionally, several outcomes that were more clearly defined did not have established indicators, making it difficult to interpret the data with respect to these outcomes. In particular, (1b) increased self-confidence, (1c) ability to establish supportive relationships, (2c) increased sense of leadership, (4c) increased ability to proactively set goals and (4d) increased ability to make safe, responsible decisions did not have indicators to measure improvements in intended outcomes.

Other limitations related to data collection included the time-bound nature of pre/post workshop assessments and limited information on satisfaction levels and improvements in outcomes related to engaging in community service. The short time period between pre- and post- assessments may have limited the ability to observe certain changes in knowledge or attitudes. While participants were exposed to new information at each workshop, some of the skills and concepts covered in the workshops may take practice, repeated exposure or extended time to develop. In the case of improved self-esteem, mentor feedback and focus group responses were able to provide additional information on the longer-term changes in self-esteem not detected in pre/post-workshop evaluations. A second post-workshop assessment at a later time may have also proved

useful for determining other long-term changes in knowledge or attitudes as well as retention of knowledge gained from previous workshops.

Though information was available regarding volunteer hours and number of participants attending each service event, no information was collected on satisfaction levels or perceived benefits for either the volunteers or the host organizations. Comments from the end-of-year focus group did provide some information on participants' perceptions of the community service aspect of the program, mainly regarding a desire for additional opportunities to engage in service and take on leadership roles in the community. However, additional information on community service events would have provided a better understanding of how this component of the program supported the YWLP's efforts of improving social development among its participants.

Despite these limitations, the program staff collected a substantial amount of data on program performance from a variety of sources and perspectives. The quantitative data from assessments demonstrated increases in knowledge and attitudes gained from program experiences, while the qualitative information from the focus group discussion with participants and mentor reports conveyed other perceived benefits of the program and potential areas for program improvements.

Recommendations

Given the findings and limitations of this formative evaluation, there are several recommendations to improve program performance within the YWLP's four objectives.

Objective 1. Recommendations to strengthen the YWLP's support of participants' emotional development include the following:

- Screen participants upon entry into the program and refer those experiencing pre-migration trauma to a mental health professional

- Train mentors to recognize signs of mental illness and contact the program coordinator to connect participants with a mental health professional

- Provide workshop sessions on managing stressors related to dating, domestic abuse, peer pressure, drug use and other social pressures identified by participants

Objective 2. Recommendations to strengthen the program's support of participants' social development include the following:

- Include additional activities to promote language and communication skills as part of quarterly workshops

- Provide additional resources to mentors to work with mentees on language and communication skills

Objective 3. Recommendation to further increase participants' commitment to learning, include the following:

- Provide additional resources to mentors to work with mentees on improving written English skills

Objective 4: Recommendations to further strengthen participants' ability to achieve self-sufficiency, include the following:

- Include additional training for mentors on refugee households' economic challenges and establish connections between mentors and caseworkers to facilitate identification and referral for problems accessing basic services.

- Include additional information on navigating and accessing social services in workshops (e.g. Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

- Screen participants for household economic problems and notify the caseworker to address identified issues.

- Identify and address barriers to full attendance at workshops and participation in internships.

In addition to these programmatic recommendations, the YWLP would benefit from improving its monitoring and evaluation strategy in order to more accurately measure program performance and identify areas for improvement. Recommendations for strengthening outcome measurement and data collection are as follows:

- Clarify definitions for the following outcomes: (1a) improved emotional health, (2a) decreased social barriers, (2b) increased community engagement, and (3a) improved academic engagement. For example, *increased academic engagement* could be more concretely defined as *increased academic performance*, which could be measured through changes in grade point average.

- Define specific indicators to measure intended outcomes. In addition to the outcomes mentioned in the previous point, the following outcomes did not have indicators by which to measure progress: (1b) increased self-confidence, (1c) ability to establish supportive relationships, (2c) increased sense of leadership, (4c) increased ability to proactively set goals and (4d) increased ability to make safe, responsible decisions. An example for outcome 2c would be the increase in number of leadership roles that participants report filling from the beginning to the end of the year or from pre- to post-program. Staff would collect this information using an annual survey or entrance and exit interviews with participants.

- Establish measurement tools to assess long-term changes, retention in knowledge and application of workshop concepts to daily life. An example of a measurement tool would be a short retention quiz administered to returning participants at the start of each year that tests knowledge and application of skills covered in the previous year.

- Introduce standardized measurement tools to track mental health outcomes and to facilitate the screening process mentioned in the previous set of programmatic recommendations. If the staff decides to keep outcome 1a as *emotional health*, one option is to use the National Institute of Health's emotional health toolbox to measure outcomes related to emotional development (NIH, 2012). This resource includes a series of surveys for various age groups that measure four emotional health domains, including negative affect, psychological well-being, stress and self-efficacy and social relationships. Another option is the World Health Organization's Quality of Life survey, which measures perceived well-being within psychological, physical, environmental and social domains (WHO, 1996). Staff members could periodically administer one or more of these surveys to screen participants and track changes in specific domains of well-being over time.

The YWLP has made considerable progress in promoting social and emotional development, a commitment to learning and ability to achieve self-sufficiency among female, adolescent refugees. By addressing identified social and economic challenges and by strengthening its monitoring and evaluation approach, the YWLP can further enhance its efforts to support refugee youth in adjusting to a new setting, working toward self-sufficiency and achieving a strong sense of well-being in resettlement.

REFERENCES

Beiser, M. (2009). Resettling refugees and safeguarding their mental health: lessons learned from the Canadian Refugee Resettlement Project. *Transcult Psychiatry, 46*(4), 539-583. doi: 10.1177/1363461509351373

Berg, M., Coman, E., & Schensul, J. J. (2009). Youth Action Research for Prevention: a multi-level intervention designed to increase efficacy and empowerment among urban youth. *Am J Community Psychol, 43*(3-4), 345-359. doi: 10.1007/s10464-009-9231-2

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013). Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment.   Retrieved March 30, 2014, from http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

Cargo, M., Grams, G. D., Ottoson, J. M., Ward, P., & Green, L. W. (2003). Empowerment as fostering positive youth development and citizenship. *Am J Health Behav, 27 Suppl 1*, S66-79.

CDC. (2013). Well-being Concepts.   Retrieved Nov 18, 2013, from http://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm

Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S. M., & Barnett, A. G. (2010). Longing to belong: social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia. *Soc Sci Med, 71*(8), 1399-1408. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.07.018

Crowley, C. (2009). The mental health needs of refugee children: a review of literature and implications for nurse practitioners. *J Am Acad Nurse Pract, 21*(6), 322-331. doi: 10.1111/j.1745-7599.2009.00413.x

CRSA. (2014). Refugees in Georgia: The Facts. Atlanta: Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies.

Dennis, B. (2012). *Quarterly Meeting Agenda: November 2012*. Young Women's Leadership Program. Refugee Family Services. Atlanta.

Dennis, B. (2013a). *Quarterly Meeting Agenda: February 2013*. Young Women's Leadership Program. Refugee Family Services. Atlanta.

Dennis, B. (2013b). *Quarterly Meeting Agenda: March 2013*. Young Women's Leadership Program. Refugee Family Services. Atlanta.

Dennis, B. (2013c). *Quarterly Meeting Agenda: May 2013*. Young Women's Leadership Program. Refugee Family Services. Atlanta.

Dennis, B. (2013d). *YWLP Flow Chart*. Refugee Family Services. Atlanta.

DHS. (2013). Refugee Resettlement. Georgia Department of Human Services.   Retrieved Oct 6, 2013, from http://dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/refugee-resettlement

Egner, R. (2011). *A Secondary Analysis of Mental Health DIsability and Treatment Implications in Recently Resettled Refugees.* (Master of Public Health), Emory University.

Fazel, M., & Stein, A. (2002). The mental health of refugee children. *Arch Dis Child, 87*(5), 366-370.

Finkelstein, A., Taubman, S., Wright, B., Bernstein, M., Gruber, J., Newhouse, J., . . . Baicker, K. (2011). The Oregon Health Insurance Experiment: Evidence form the First Year. *NBER Working Paper, 17190*.

HHS. About HHS.   Retrieved April 7, 2014, from http://www.hhs.gov/about/

Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*(4), 602-611. doi: 10.2307/2392366

Khuwaja, S. A., Selwyn, B. J., Mgbere, O., Khuwaja, A., Kapadia, A., McCurdy, S., & Hsu, C. W. E. (2013). Factors Associated with the Process of Adaptation Among Pakistani Adolescent Females Living in United States. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 15*(2), 315-325. doi: 10.1007/s10903-012-9703-6

Kia-Keating, M., & Ellis, B. H. (2007). Belonging and connection to school in resettlement: young refugees, school belonging, and psychosocial adjustment. *Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry, 12*(1), 29-43.

Moody, K. A., Childs, J. C., & Sepples, S. B. (2003). Intervening with at-risk youth: evaluation of the youth empowerment and support program. *Pediatr Nurs, 29*(4), 263-270.

Murray, K. E., Davidson, G. R., & Schweitzer, R. D. (2010). Review of refugee mental health interventions following resettlement: best practices and recommendations. *Am J Orthopsychiatry, 80*(4), 576-585. doi: 10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01062.x

NIH. (2012). NIH Toolbox For the Assessment of Neurological and Behavioral Function. Retrieved 8 March 2014, from http://www.nihtoolbox.org/WhatAndWhy/Emotion/Pages/default.aspx

Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2012). *Refugee Act of 1980*. Washington D.C.: Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/the-refugee-act.

Phelan, J. C., Link, B. G., Diez-Roux, A., Kawachi, I., & Levin, B. (2004). "Fundamental causes" of social inequalities in mortality: a test of the theory. *J Health Soc Behav, 45*(3), 265-285.

RFS. (2011). Strategic Plan: October 2011- September 2014. Atlanta: Refugee Family Services.

RFS. (2013a). Greatest Program/ Project Needs: Presented to the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. In R. F. Services (Ed.). Atlanta: Refugee Family Services.

RFS. (2013b). Primary Evaluation Framework Report: Refugee Family Services.

Saunders, R. P., Evans, M. H., & Joshi, P. (2005). Developing a process-evaluation plan for assessing health promotion program implementation: a how-to guide. *Health Promot Pract, 6*(2), 134-147. doi: 10.1177/1524839904273387

Shah, M. K., Kambou, S. D., Goparaju, L., Adams, M. K., & Matarazzo, J. M. (2004). *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of Community and Faith-Based Organizations*. Core initiative and USAID Retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADB439.pdf.

Stetler, C. B., Legro, M. W., Wallace, C. M., Bowman, C., Guihan, M., Hagedorn, H., . . . Smith, J. L. (2006). The Role of Formative Evaluation in Implementation Research and the QUERI Experience. *J Gen Intern Med, 21*(S2), S1-S8. doi: 10.1111/j.1525-1497.2006.00355.x

UN General Assembly. (1951). *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Geneva: United Nations.

UNHCR. (2011). Resettlement within UNHCR's Mandate: International Protection and the Search for Durable SolutionsUNHCR Resettlement Handbook. Geneva: United Nations High Commisioner for Refugees. Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/3d464b239.html.

Weine, S. (2008). Family roles in refugee youth resettlement from a prevention perspective. *Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am, 17*(3), 515-532, vii-viii. doi: 10.1016/j.chc.2008.02.006

WHO. (1996). WHOQOL-BREF: Introduction, administration, scoring and generic version of the assessment. Geneva: Program on Mental Health, World Health Organization.

Willis, M. S., & Nkwocha, O. (2006). Health and related factors for Sudanese refugees in Nebraska. *J Immigr Minor Health, 8*(1), 19-33.

Zand, D. H., Thomson, N., Cervantes, R., Espiritu, R., Klagholz, D., LaBlanc, L., & Taylor, A. (2009). The mentor-youth alliance: the role of mentoring relationships in promoting youth competence. *J Adolesc, 32*(1), 1-17. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.12.006

Zedan, S. H. (2007). Community YouthMapping: female youth voices through empowerment and workforce preparation. *New Dir Youth Dev*(116), 87-98, 11. doi: 10.1002/yd.236

Zimmerman, M. A., Bingenheimer, J. B., & Notaro, P. C. (2002). Natural mentors and adolescent resiliency: a study with urban youth. *Am J Community Psychol, 30*(2), 221-243.