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At Home in King County: Educational Access in King County for Adult Somali Refugees

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Abstract

While there is global research on the topic of adult refugee education, there is limited research on the accessibility of education for adult refugees in King County, Washington. My research offers an analysis of educational accessibility in King County for refugees from the African nation of Somalia, which is the provenance of the largest refugee population in the area. I conducted interviews with representatives from local organizations, namely Refugee Women's Alliance, Refugees Northwest, Seattle Public Libraries, and Literacy Source in order to gain a better understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by these organizations and the refugees they serve, particularly regarding educational services. I argue that adult refugee education must be culturally aware and trauma informed for refugees to achieve a more expansive level of success. Additionally, a diversity of programs is necessary to meet all educational needs. In order to ensure that these types of programs are available in King County, governments at the city, county, and state levels must allocate more funding to refugee resettlement. The ultimate goal of this research is to advocate for refugee success and independence through education, with an emphasis on fortifying coping mechanisms and producing new knowledge to meet new challenges.

Introduction

From his election in 2016 to his defeat in 2020, former President Trump's administration continually lowered the refugee admittance cap, allowing fewer and fewer refugees to find relative safety in the United States. Although Trump's restrictions have been celebrated in conservative circles that value American border security, he has been widely criticized elsewhere for turning his back on families escaping violence, famine, and persecution (Hightower, 2019). One critic of Trump's limited refugee admittance policies is Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan. On November 14, 2019, Durkan voiced her support of refugee resettlement in Seattle in a letter to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (Hightower, 2019) echoing a decision made earlier in 2017 by the city of Seattle, King County, and the Seattle Foundation to provide $2.25 million for refugee and immigrant services (King County, 2017). What remains unclear is the effectiveness of these services in integrating refugees into society once they arrive in Seattle. This paper will focus on one factor that determines a person's ability to integrate into a host society: their access to education.

Refugees require education, regardless of age, gender, or previous education status, and each person has different educational needs (Winchester, 2016). Arguably, refugees should first learn English in order to be independent members of society, able to perform basic functions such as going to the store, going to the doctor, calling the police, and other functions in their new communities. Additionally, professionals need to be reeducated within the context of American language and societal norms through universities and certification programs (Winchester, 2016). Education such as this ensures that refugees are given the tools to succeed socially and economically in their host communities, unlocking opportunities for advancement and community (Winchester, 2016).

This paper offers a comprehensive review of refugee access to education in King County, Washington. My initial research revealed a gap in secondary literature about refugee education in King County despite an abundance of research concerning refugee education globally. The limited secondary literature about refugees in King County focused primarily on Southeast Asian refugee resettlement in the 1970s and 1980s, and existing literature has in the past examined health-related risks and medical conditions instead of focusing on resettlement or education.

This paper specifically considers educational accessibility for adult refugees from Somalia. Numbering 2,560 people in 2019, Somalian refugees make up the largest group of refugees in King County (Washington State Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, 2019). This paper uses secondary sources about refugee education on a global scale to provide a basis for primary source analysis relevant to King County, including federal, state, county and city policies, regulations, declarations, and interviews with representatives from local

non-governmental organizations (NGOs). From these sources, I compiled a summary of programs and services available for refugees in King County. I determine the necessity of culturally aware, trauma informed, and comprehensive educational programs for refugees. I conclude that the greatest (compounded and interrelated) barriers to both refugees seeking educational opportunities and organizations seeking to provide resources alike is limited available time on the part of refugees juggling many responsibilities, and inadequate funding allocated to organizations serving refugees. I argue that local governments can help refugees and organizations overcome these barriers by allocating more funds for refugee resettlement grants.

Defining "Refugee" and "Education"

For the purpose of this research, I will use the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees definition of "refugee":

> a refugee is a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in 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 [*sic*] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [*sic*] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Convention relating to the status of refugees, 1951, pg.152)

This definition differentiates refugees from internally displaced people, who are forced to flee their homes because of instability or violence there but do not cross state borders (McBrien, 2005). This definition also differentiates refugees from migrants, who choose to relocate to a new region or country for financial or personal gain (McBrien, 2005). This research will focus primarily on the experiences of refugees, who are arguably an especially vulnerable population. That being said, there are many similarities between the educational opportunities for migrants and refugees (McBrien, 2005). Because there are holes in the existing refugee literature, I will employ some sources pertaining to migrants.

Education is not easily defined. Beista explains that when we say "education" we are generally referring to one of five things: formal institutions, such as schools and universities; domains of practice, such as adult education or vocational education; processes associated with formal institutions and domains, such as lessons or lectures; activity of education, such as teaching or mentoring; and the outcome of education, such as a graduated person or an educated person (2015). However, even within these five meanings, there is uncertainty: for example, learning can take place outside of formal institutions, expanding the boundaries of

educational opportunities and calling for a more holistic understanding of what it means to be an educated individual. For the purpose of this research, I will be using a broad definition of education that includes the formal institutions traditionally associated with education as well as less-structured ways of learning new skills and information.

Background: Refugees in King County

Over the last 40 years, refugees have entered Washington State from a multitude of places and as a result of various historical traumas: for example, there was a spike in the numbers of Southeast Asian refugees entering Washington State following the Vietnam War, as well as an increase in refugees fleeing the Soviet Union following its collapse (Riley, 2015). Today, East Africans make up a significant portion of the refugee community due to regional conflicts that are a colonial legacy (Riley, 2015). Of the refugees that have settled in the state since 2003, refugees from Somalia rank third in population (Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs briefing book, 2019).

When discussing refugees, it is imperative to examine the unique reasons for displacement from their country of origin, also known as push factors. Somalia has struggled since its inception to maintain peace and order for a variety of reasons. In the nineteenth century, Somalia was divided into smaller territories controlled by its colonizers, Britain, Italy, and France, but in 1960 the constructed factions merged to form the United Republic of Somalia. After independence, Somalia struggled to maintain stability due to conflict amongst different ethnic groups and political parties. The lines and borders drawn by Europeans in Eastern Africa ignore the geography of local ethnic groups, resulting in many Somali people living in other states and many members of other ethnic groups living in Somalia. This causes uncertainty as to who has the right to rule in Somalia. Additionally, different regions of Somalia adopted competing political ideologies of Britain and Italy, creating a division about the best way to rule. Following conflicts with neighboring state Ethiopia in the 1980s, a series of coups and a civil war amongst clans vying for regional authority broke out in 1991. The devastation of the conflicts was compounded by devastating drought. Multiple iterations of peace treaties and pacts were created and broken. The United Nations, The Organization of African Unity, and many other nations have all tried various interventions to no avail. Campaigns by UN peacekeepers and the United States government only succeeded in escalating violence. A stable government has yet to be maintained in Somalia, resulting in continued violence (Lansford & Tom 2019). The conflicts rooted in colonial legacy persist to this day, and the Somalian refugee population continues to grow as a result (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra 2018). Because refugee resettlement offices try to place refugees in cities or areas that already have refugees of the same nationality, the Somalian refugee population in Seattle is

steadily growing (Forrest, Mott, & Brown, 2014).

Somalian refugees face a multitude of challenges both before and after their arrival in the US. Ferriss, Strode, and Shandra's study on Somali refugee post-traumatic stress explained that before they are forced to leave their country, refugees experience trauma such as "catastrophic destruction of homes and communities, the murder of family members and neighbors, rape, being lost, torture, kidnappings[,] and bombings" (2018). As they flee, their trauma continues in the harsh and often violent conditions of overpopulated refugee camps. Stress and anxiety are compounded in these camps as refugees await news about their applications for refugee status through the US Refugee Admissions Program (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra 2018). Once people arrive in the US, they must then struggle to build community within the context of American culture, especially when their own family unit is fractured by transit to the US (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra, 2018). They must also grapple with a loss of professional or social status, for though in their home countries they may have been respected, affluent members of the community, in the US they are often stripped of their professional qualifications as a result of the relocation process and forced to search for other sources of income. (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra, 2018). These factors combined may negatively impact the mental and physical health of refugees, which in turn may affect their experience of education (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra, 2018).

Existing Literature: Global Refugee Education

In the following section, I will explain the necessity for adult refugee education and explores its various challenges. I will conclude with a discussion of some typical adult refugee education models to provide a context for my analysis of refugee education in King County.

Prioritizing Adult Refugee Education

Due to different interests and priorities, each country has unique goals and agendas regarding refugees and refugee services. Countries are categorized by social scientists as either a "transit country" or a "destination country." The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a transit country as "the country through which migratory flows (regular or irregular) move" (Perruchoud, & Redpath-Cross, 2011). Transit countries typically border a refugee's country of origin. The primary priorities of transit country governments are to provide temporary food and housing, and they often help people apply for refugee status so that they can continue on to their destination countries (Duvell, Molodikova, & Collyer, 2014). The ISO defines a destination country, also called third country, receiving country, or host country, as "the country that is a destination for migratory flows (regular or

irregular)" (Perruchoud, & Redpath-Cross, 2011). The primary priorities of destination country governments are to integrate refugees into their societies. This longer-term approach focuses on employment and community building (Duvell, Molodikova, & Collyer, 2014). Education—language acquisition especially—is necessary for both employment and community building. In the case of the Somalian refugee experience, Kenya acts as a transit country and the US is a destination country (Ferriss, Strode, & Shandra, 2018).

After months or, more likely, years of displacement and trauma, refugees arrive in their new location with hopes of stability. Before that is possible, they must learn how to live independently in their new settings. For many adult refugees, true independence requires a level of education that allows them to work, be active in their children's educations, and be financially autonomous. This typically means being conversant in the local language, having reading proficiency in that language, and possessing relevant technical skills (Stepping up: refugee education in crisis, 2018). Refugees obtain these skills, and therefore a measure of independence, through educational programs and classes (Benseman, 2014). From a psychological standpoint, education contributes to improved mental and social wellbeing as it allows adult refugees to build communities in their new setting (McBrien, 2005). While this is true for refugees of all ages, adult refugees take longer to adapt to their new environment than younger refugees (Khamphakdy-Brown, Jones, Nilsson, Russel & Klevens, 2006). It is for these reasons that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has determined that education is a pillar to emergency response, prioritized with nearly equal importance as food, water, and shelter (2018).

Adult refugee education after resettlement is also imperative because it improves the quality of education to which refugee children have access. Students are most likely to succeed when parents can have an active role in their children's education; for example, when parents understand how to check grades and can attend parent-teacher conferences, their children are more likely to achieve satisfactory educational outcomes (McBrien, 2005). Additionally, the more education and language comprehension parents can attain, the less dependent they are on their children to act as translators. These child-translators bear the weight of family stress, causing them to feel obligated to provide stability for their family and thus negatively impacting the child's education (McBrien, 2005). Teenage and young adult refugees often drop out of school in order to financially support parents who cannot work or can only work low-income jobs due to their level of education and language proficiency (UNHCR, 2018).

Challenges to Adult Refugee Education

Many of the frustrations facing refugees seeking an education are familiar to anyone who has learned a new language. In John Benseman's study, interviewees described

the struggle of learning to pronounce and hear unfamiliar sounds in new languages, understanding people speaking too fast, and recalling new vocabulary (2014). However, there are additional barriers and frustrations that refugees face outside of language acquisition, such as health issues, family care, transportation, and understanding of available resources (Benseman, 2014). The most universal struggles were financial barriers, especially regarding higher education (Lipka, 2006), and time constraints (Benseman, 2014). Many refugees experience significant time constraints because of inflexible work schedules and familial responsibilities. As a consequence, refugees find themselves starved for time to attend classes or to study (Benseman, 2014).

A consistent challenge for highly educated refugees was that associated with the loss of professional certificates (Zolberg & Benda, 2001). In most cases, people fleeing their countries are unable to bring with them evidence of their academic qualifications, and even if they do bring their credentials, they may not be accepted because of varying national, state, and local standards (Zolberg & Benda, 2001). Therefore, many of these highly educated refugees cannot obtain a job in their field or continue their studies, limiting their ability to continue their careers: they can attempt to start over in an American school, or they can obtain a job for which they are overqualified (Zolberg & Benda, 2001). East Africans specifically expressed frustration over this "brain waste" (Balahadia, 2016, p. 22). As one man specifically stated, "I know many taxi drivers that have PhDs. It's incredible that their assets can't be recognized" (Balahadia, 2016, p. 22).

Another factor negatively impacting refugee education is the trauma of forced displacement. Trauma, which is "an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being," impairs the brain's ability to make decisions, remember, and learn (Imad, 2020). Trauma impacts learning because chronic stress directs energy in the brain towards survival, causing atrophy in the parts of our brain that we require to process and remember new information (Imad, 2020). In the case of refugee learners, continuously uncertain circumstances and unforeseeable futures can cause refugees to worry about themselves and their immediate and extended families. This worry can manifest in short attention spans, nervous energy, and indifference to course topics (Benseman, 2014). The severity of refugee trauma demands that educators working with refugees are trained to accommodate adult learners with traumatic experience (Benseman, 2014).

Adult Refugee Education Programs

Because every refugee has a unique background of education and experience, a nearly unlimited number of programs and methods are in place around the world to educate adult refugees. Many programs work to teach the basic language proficiency necessary to enter the workforce, and in the US this is the most common type of program offered (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019). There are classes offered in reading, writing, and speaking in the English language, and some programs combine classes to also include job skills like digital literacy (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019). Some programs are targeted towards refugees with English literacy who need to expand their professional vocabulary for their target field of work or study (Balahadia, 2016). Other programs assist refugees in applying for scholarships, crafting resumes, and finding jobs (Lipka, 2006). Meanwhile, other programs such as low-literacy classes are geared towards people who must "learn how to learn" in their primary language (Benseman, 2014, pg. 98). Low-literacy classes demand highly experienced teachers, and often also utilize bilingual tutors (Benseman, 2014). The goals of these programs include assisting learners in recognizing letters, writing simple sentences, and developing conversational skills in the English language (Benseman, 2014). Other programs do not distinguish themselves based on the level of learner; rather, they target a specific demographic such as women, young adults, or people from specific countries (Balahadia, 2016). These programs focus on the challenges specific to these demographics. For example, a program working with women may spend a class learning how to discuss their children's wellbeing with a teacher (Balahadia, 2016). The goal of having a variety of teaching methods is to ensure that there is an adequate form of education for all refugees, regardless of gender, age, previous education, or native language.

The literature surrounding adult refugee education focuses on language acquisition, and while language training is at the core of refugee education, it is insufficient to focus on language acquisition alone. The primary reason that refugees desire language education is so that they can work; however, in the job market, literacy is considered a minimum requirement for employment. Employers seek to hire employees with so-called "hard" skills such as computer literacy, and "soft" skills such as organization, integrity, and leadership. If refugee education does not incorporate hard and soft skill acquisition, then even the limited resources given to refugee education cannot be fully utilized.

Foundations and Structures of Support for King County Refugees

Through my initial research, it became evident that the refugee education system in King County is not reliant on a single organization or office to provide all necessary services. Rather, a web of governmental offices, public services, non-profit organizations, and community-based organizations collaborate to maximize the reach and depth of refugee

education. The governmental structures for refugee support in King County are rooted in the United States Refugee Act of 1980, which created the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The goal of the 1980 Act was to create a permanent organization to support refugee relocation and assimilation (Refugee Act, 1980). The first section of the Act establishes that part of the role of the ORR is to "provide refugees with the opportunity to acquire sufficient English language training to enable them to become effectively resettled as quickly as possible" (Refugee Act, 1980). Throughout its original document and updated resolutions, the ORR has emphasized the importance of education in refugee resettlement (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). The ORR asserts that all states must have formal resources to support refugees, but the state has the freedom to choose the exact structure of these resources (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2019).

In Washington State, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) houses the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2015). Established in 2012, OIRA administers programs to assist in the transition of refugee resettlement. It does this through programs like the Limited English Proficient (LEP) Pathways program (Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2015), which works with community colleges and NGOs to provide English training appropriate to the skill levels of the individual (Washington State Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, 2019). If necessary, OIRA covers the cost of these classes (Washington State Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, 2019).

Research Design

The goal of my research was to simulate the methodology of a 2016 report commissioned by Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) that explored and assessed the experiences of East Africans in the city of Seattle. The researcher Aileen Balahadia used interviews with community leaders and focus groups to integrate stories and experiences of East Africans with data and background about the communities living in Seattle (Balahadia, 2016). The interview questions were broad, and interviewees were encouraged to direct the conversation to their concerns and points of interest. Only after listening to the needs of the community did she make recommendations to policy makers and the general public (Balahadia, 2016). This approach is favorable because it prioritizes the voices of the people who work within the system and who best understand the community's needs. In my research, I built background information and worked to understand the structures that support refugee education, but, like the OIRA report, the policy recommendations are reflective of the needs and interests of the organizations that support refugee education.

In the course of my research, I worked with a variety of organizations and offices that either offer refugee education programs or refer refugees to educational opportunities. With IRB approval I interviewed the Annual Giving Officer/Youth Program Director, as well as the Executive Director of the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA); the Director of Community Programs at Refugee Northwest Seattle; the Adult Literacy Program Manager at Seattle Public Libraries (SPL); and the Volunteer Outreach Coordinator at Literacy Source. I chose my interviewees by reaching out to all organizations in King County that support refugee education and conducting interviews with the representatives who returned my calls and emails. My interviews were conducted either at the locations of the organizations being discussed or over the phone, and they each lasted between 30-45 minutes. I focused on four primary questions: tell me about yourself; tell me about your organization; tell me about the programs and classes your organization provide; and tell me about who uses your resources. Based on the interviewees' answers to these questions, I also asked follow-up questions (Appendix A).

Research Limitations

Due to time constraints, my research is very specific. I focused on only adult refugees from Somalia, but there is a need for a comprehensive evaluation considering refugee education for refugees of all ages and national origins. My research was also resticted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the process of trying to gain contact with some organizations was interrupted by the pandemic; I ceased sending follow-up emails and phone calls to organizations beyond the four I interviewed, further limiting the scope of my research. Another limitation to my research is Seattle University's IRB restrictions concerning interviewing refugees. Ideally, research about adult refugee education would include the thoughts, ideas, and opinions of refugees because it is the goal of my research to determine the best ways to serve refugees. Therefore, future research should incorporate refugee voices.

Analysis of Interviews

Overview of Organizations

The Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA) is a local NGO that was founded in 1985 with the goal of assisting refugee women in integrating into their new societies. Today, it has eight locations throughout King County that include childcare centers, a domestic violence center, and an immigration center (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). They also offer a variety of resources ranging from English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to housing assistance programs (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). In 2019, they served 2,913 refugee and immigrant people

through their various programs and workshops (Refugee Women's Alliance, 2019). They receive their funding through federal, state, county, city, and private grants, as well as through private contributions (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020).

Refugees Northwest is a refugee resettlement organization run by Lutheran Community Services Northwest, a regional NGO headquartered in Portland, Oregon. Refugee Northwest programs include cross-cultural mental health services, refugee elder programs, immigration assistance, and ESOL classes (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Each of their programs is funded through a different source, but some examples of these funding sources are Medicaid and federal, state, and private grants (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020).

The Seattle Public Library (SPL) plays a role in refugee education through ESOL classes, advocacy workshops, speaking groups, and walk-in tutoring at its locations throughout King County. The Adult Literacy Program Manager explains that "the goal of public libraries is that any person can come in with any question, from 'How do I fill out this form?' to 'How can I go to community college?' and receive an answer and any help they need" (Jough, 2020). SPL's adult education programs are funded through the Seattle Public Library Foundation, which is made up of private donors (Jough, 2020).

Founded in 1986, Literacy Source is an NGO that provides educational opportunities to all adult learners, including ESOL, math, digital literacy, and citizenship classes (Socha, 2020). Their Ready to Work program is particularly popular amongst refugee learners (Socha, 2020). Literacy Source is contracted out by SPL, Refugees Northwest, and the city government to provide classes and programs (Socha, 2020).

Impactful Services

The existing secondary literature about refugee education focuses primarily on language acquisition; however, every representative that I talked to stressed the importance of education beyond ESOL. Refugees Northwest's Director of Community Programs, Amy Lloyd-Wagner, explained that refugee education must include the provision of functional and situational education that assists them in navigating real life situations in American culture and society (2020). This study challenged my narrow definition of education as knowledge provided within the four walls of a classroom: in fact, educational programs can include educational workshops, field trips, meetings with case managers, and engagement with local representatives. Each of these must be considered part of refugee education because it is through these programs that refugees learn to apply their language and career classes.

The first programs important to highlight are ESOL classes. ESOL classes were offered at each of the NGOs I interviewed, but ESOL classes are the primary focus of Literacy Source, so my discussion will center on their ESOL programs. Literary Source offers a variety of ESOL classes, ranging from "no English knowledge" to "advanced reading and writing."

Students attend an orientation where they are tested and interviewed in order to place them in the appropriate level of class (Socha, 2020). Literacy Source's classes are offered in 10-week sections that mirror local universities' quarter systems. Literacy Source also practices student-based learning techniques, meaning that at the beginning of the course, students work together as a class to create goals and learning outcomes and the instructor then builds a curriculum to meet those goals (Socha, 2020). Classes are taught by certified adult educators with the help of volunteer class assistants. Students also have access to walk-in or scheduled tutoring with volunteer tutors as well as access to Literacy Source's library which is organized specifically for ESOL learners (Socha, 2020).

The second program type, hard skills training is a common extension of refugee education. SPL offers classes through Literary Source that combine English as a second language with computer literacy and job skills (Jough, 2020). Resume workshops, offered at every organization that I interviewed, are an example of hard skill development. At the end of these classes or workshops, students come away with a clearer understanding of American work culture and have cultivated skills that employers seek in their employees. Additionally, ReWA offers programs in home-healthcare training and childcare provision. In order to take part in these classes, participants must have passed the first two levels of ESOL classes offered at ReWA. At the completion of these programs, participants earn professional certificates required in the state of Washington (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). Even for refugees with prior work experience, these certificates are crucial. In a ReWA blog, one woman explains, "I have 40 years of experience teaching, but without credentials it was difficult to get a job" (Walby, 2020). After participating in one of the variety of programs offered by ReWa, students can work at preschools, daycares, or as home care providers (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020).

A third type of refugee education programs involve case managers who work one on one with clients to ensure they successfully gain employment (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). These case managers assist in several ways: they help refugees navigate King County's job market; they can refer people to programs, classes, and workshops to build the skills they need to enter the workforce; they can assist with resumes and job applications; once a person has been employed, a case manager checks in on the status of employment; finally, if a client needs to find a new job, the case manager can continue to support them (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Organizations that use case managers include ReWA, Seattle Public Libraries, and Refugees Northwest. In many cases, it is necessary that that case managers be fluent in the language of the refugees they are working with, and Lloyd-Wagner explained to me the difficulty of finding specialists fluent in African languages like Somali (2020).

The forth critical program category is systems navigation via classes, workshops and other programs. These programs range from using public transportation to understanding

family law. For example, one unit of ReWA is dedicated to people experiencing domestic violence (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). Refugees Northwest has a program to support refugees with complex medical conditions to navigate doctor visits, prescription refills, insurance, and other aspects of the American healthcare system (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Another example of system navigation is parent workshops where parents learn how to communicate with their children's teachers. One of ReWA's youth programs requires that parents take classes so they can understand how to best support their students. ReWA's youth programs director recalls one session of the class where parents took pictures of a sick note so they knew what to write to avoid their children being marked as truant (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). Perhaps the most important thing to note about these system navigation programs is that, according to Refugee's Northwest and ReWA, they all stem from needs voiced by the refugee community itself (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Informing people of the laws that protect them and assisting them to use the resources available to them is an important aspect of refugee education (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020).

The fifth and final critical refugee program type is advocacy. It is through education about their own rights that refugees become able to self-advocate. SPL, ReWA, and Refugees Northwest offer programs to help refugees and immigrants understand the naturalization process, their rights regarding the police and Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and their ability to be involved in policy decisions (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Jough, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Once a year, ReWA transports clients to Olympia for a meeting with their legislators, before which ReWA helps them develop a plan to express their needs. Recently, the refugee organizations in Seattle have been working together with the United States Census Bureau to encourage all people with refugee and immigrant status to fill out the 2020 census. Through fliers and word of mouth, these organizations are educating refugees about how the 2020 census determines policy surrounding issues like voting, welfare, infrastructure, and education (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020, Jough, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020; Socha, 2020).

The Imperfect Web: Analysis of Organizational Cooperation

In the absence of robust governmental support, organizations in King County have had to establish both informal and formal service networks. This system of partnerships creates a system of refugee educational services that is far from ideal, but could be imporoved with greater funding from King County. Some partnerships are short term, such as ReWA working with Refugees Northwest to offer a mental health workshop (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Other partnerships are more enduring, such as SPL and Literacy Source's ESOL classes (Jough, 2020). Another way that refugee organizations work together is through coalitions, such as Northwest Immigrant and Refugee Health Coalition or the Eastside Immigrant and Refugee

Coalition. In joining a coalition, organizations commit to its goals; coalitions meet regularly to determine each organization's role in achieving those goals (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020).

ESOL classes exemplify how these informal networks operate and the variety of services they offer. While the quarter-long ESOL classes offered by Literacy Source and ReWA pride themselves on student engagement in community building with learning, consistent attendance is necessary to succeed in their programs (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Socha, 2020). To accommodate the need of students who are unable to commit to weekly clasess, Refugees Northwest and SPL offer drop-in tutoring and classes where anyone can stop in at any time (Jough, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). With the number of organizations and the variety of classes offered, the hope is that every refugee learner can find an option that works for their language goals and schedule.

These informal coalitions offer services that meet the needs of refugees, but imperfectly. For example, OIRA does not have the resources to provide refugee education, so they fund education ventures through various other organizations, like ReWA, Refugees Northwest, and Literacy Source (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020; Socha, 2020). Refugees Northwest does not provide ESOL classes, so they rely on Literacy Source for English language acquisition (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020); but Literacy Source does not provide childcare, so they use ReWA for those services (Jough, 2020). Further, ReWA aids domestic violence survivors (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020), while Refugees Northwest provides mental healthcare assistance and education programs (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Therefore, if a refugee needed all of the aforementioned services—ESOL, childcare, domestic abuse assistance, and mental healthcare—they would need to go to three or four different organizations. Furthermore, these numerous organizations are spread throughout the greater Seattle area from SeaTac to North Seattle. The fact that these services are diffused around King County helps mitigate some transportation barriers to education, but not all services are offered at each location. Due to the restrictions of COVID-19, several refugee organizations have moved their programs online (Literacy Source, 2020; Refugees Northwest, 2020; Walby, 2020). While access to the internet might be a barrier to some refugees attending classes, continuing to host some trainings in a hybrid or fully-online format in the future would mitigate the transportation barriers some refugees faced prior to COVID-19.

This web of offices and organizations attempts to serve all refugees in King County; however, evidence reveals that many of the clients are still unable to access the resources they require. The organizations hope that if one program or service is not accessible, another organization will be able to offer the support they need. Despite collaboration among these groups, the system can be difficult to navigate. I was fortunate to have the time and resources needed to understand all of the refugee programs offered, but many clients are unable to generate the time, resources, and ability to navigate each organization's website to determine

which program would be most beneficial for their needs. In addition to the creation of a concise database of resources in key languages—including Somali—educational programs such as workshops are needed to help refugees learn about the educational system itself.

Addressing Limitations of Education Services

There are many holes in the web that prevent organizational efforts from being completely successful in providing educational services to refugees. One of these shortfalls concerns refugees who come to the US with degrees or professional certificates. While local organizations support refugees in their job search through case management and career workshops, there are no established programs that support refugees seeking American certification or degrees in fields they have previously studied. My research found that there is an imbalance in the resources allocated to preparing refugees for service sector jobs and the resources allocated to re-education and recertification. These services might be available at local community colleges, but as a whole, King County organizations do not provide these imperative services.

Another recurring challenge that organizations emphasized was understaffing. In order to offer the diverse programs that improve educational access for refugees, organizations must employ a multilingual staff of highly educated people, and this is not feasible with King County's current funding shortfalls (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020; Socha, 2020). In order to make a livable wage in King County, employees of local NGOs must do the jobs of several people (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020). This affects their ability to serve all the clients who seek their services; for example, if someone is split between three roles, then they are unable to put their full energy into any role. To simplify, the employees of local NGOs are overworked and underpaid, resulting in a high turnover rate in local NGOs and offices that support refugees (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). It is not a lack of care for the cause that pushes people from these jobs, but rather an inability to support themselves and their families on the salaries they receive. Like the refugees they serve, employees are limited by time, and they must make difficult decisions regarding how they spend that time. Mahnaz Eshetu of ReWA explained that grants do not move with inflation, so each year their organization is expected to offer more services with fewer resources. She values her employees and wishes that she could offer them a more competitive wage, stating that "I think many people forget that these people are educated professionals, and the fact that they often cannot earn a livable wage is frustrating" (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020).

There are some obstacles to refugee education that, despite their best efforts, organizations can only mitigate and not eradicate. Every organization identified time as one of the most significant barriers refugees face in gaining an education (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020,

Jough, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020; Socha, 2020). There is a saying that "we all have the same 24 hours in a day." However, this is not true for people who work several jobs to provide for their family, must care for their children, or have to travel long distances to attend classes. For many, 24 hours is not enough time to accomplish all that they may desire—including an education. There is an added pressure of time created by the limitations of financial support that refugees receive. When refugees come to Seattle, they receive financial support from the federal government for three months, at the end of which they are expected to be fully acclimated into their new society and gainfully employed (Eshetu & Pamm, 2020; Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Because of the high cost of living in King County, many refugees must work two or three full time jobs in order to support themselves and their families, leaving no time to study or take classes (Lloyd-Wagner, 2020). Refugees cannot be expected to prioritize education when they are struggling to make a living. If a refugee is not working several jobs, they may be the primary childcare provider in their household. Therefore, the absence of childcare services makes the classes offered by local organizations inaccessible. Yet another way that time constrains refugee education is transportation to and the location of educational services. If a program or class is too far away via public transport or walking, refugees are unlikely to commit to the program or class. Time was a theme throughout my research; every interviewee I spoke with reinforced the obstacle that the lack of available time creates for adult refugees.

Proposed Solutions

The solutions proposed by this research are centered around state, county, and city policies. Other possible solutions could be centered around NGO organizational structure or budget allocation, and more potential solutions could include institutions of public education. I focused on public policy as the most direct way to advocate for the people and organizations who work tirelessly to provide educational opportunities for adult refugees. I searched for an innovative solution to the challenges that refugees face when seeking an education, however, as I pursued this research, it became apparent that the most impactful action that local governments can take is to increase their financial support to refugees and the organizations that serve them. As previously noted, King County and the Seattle Foundation allocated $2.25 million in 2017 for refugee resettlement efforts (King County, 2017). While this refugee fund was beneficial, it is insufficient considering the depth of the services that refugee resettlement requires. Furthermore, increased financial support for refugee communities is beneficial to wider King County, as acknowledged in "Advancing Equity and Opportunity for King County Immigrants and Refugees: A Report from the King County":

> It is also important to acknowledge the critical role immigrants and refugees play in building vibrant communities all around King County. Immigrants and refugees make

> significant contributions at every social and economic stratum in the County from CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, to academic leaders, doctors, lawyers, and small business leaders. (2016, pg. 6)

I propose that state, county, and city governments support refugee education by offering financial assistance to refugees beyond the first three months of settlement and by providing more financial support to organizations in the form of grants.

The unfortunate reality is that no bill or act of law can give Somali refugees more time in a day. However, by extending the period of government financial support to refugees beyond three months, local governments will alleviate some of the pressure put on refugees to become fully independent members of the workforce. Right now, many people are forced to choose between working two jobs to support their family and working one job while pursuing an education. One choice limits options for upwards mobility but provides sufficient income for refugees and their families, while the other choice secures higher future earnings but does not provide a livable income. The reality is that there is no real choice here; people must do whatever it takes to maintain their livelihoods, including stalling their education. However, if refugees have a longer period to adjust to life in King County, they are more likely to seek educational opportunities. The provision of adequate resources can help generate an increase in productivity and leisure time that forms a much-needed work-life balance. Mitigating some of these significant barriers to refugee education could help create a more balanced social and cultural framework for Somalian refugees in Washington state, King County, and the city of Seattle.

The other way that local governments can support refugee education is by increasing financial support to the organizations that serve refugees. Additionally, grants should move with inflation or be reevaluated on a yearly basis to account for inflation. Principally, these organizations need funding in order to expand their services so they can meet the needs of all King County refugees. My research indicated that what works for refugee education is a variety of class times and locations, access to childcare, and programs in addition to existing ESOL classes. Further, educational opportunities for adult refugees must be curated in many different fields of study or areas of skill. However, providing a more holistic approach to education requires funding to rent out new spaces, to hire more educators and specialists, and to purchase learning materials. Classes, workshops, fieldtrips, and other programs are not free, and in order to provide the depth of education that refugees need, organizations require more funding from state, county, and city governments. In addition to more programming opportunities, increased funding allows organizations to pay their employees a livable wage. Having an educated, multilingual staff of educators, case workers, program directors, and other professionals is essential to ensuring culturally aware and trauma informed education for adult refugees, and this necessitates an income that permits employees to live in a high-cost

area and to support themselves and their families. Further, a higher wage will result in lower turnover and more efficient operations. Refugee organizations in Seattle have proven their strength as they work together to provide a variety of opportunities for refugees to participate in education, but additional funding will ensure that more Somali refugees have access to essential programs and resources.

Conclusion

First and foremost, Somali refugees are people with families and jobs and lives that they left behind in search of safety and stability. They have faced intense trauma and loss, and they have persevered through years of uncertainty to arrive at SEATAC airport. They deserve to be greeted with respect and compassion when they finally settle in King County. These people should be given the tools to navigate their new community, they should be empowered to be independent self-advocates, and they should feel at home in King County. Educational opportunities are the key to incorporating Somali refugees into the community. In order to tangibly increase access to educational opportunities, local and federal governments must provide more funding towards resettlement efforts. Somali newcomers need the prolonged stability that living stipends supply, and the organizations who work relentlessly to provide necessary services to refugees require financial support to create a variety of culturally aware and trauma informed educational services. For the Somali people who are new to King County, these resources are vital. With educational access, they are able acclimate and flourish in their new home, making the communities in which they live all the more vibrant.

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