



An Eritrean Mother-Child Support Group; Project Design and Implementation

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Asylum Seekers in Israel

As of February 2018, there were approximately 35,000 asylum seekers residing in Israel, primarily (73%) from Eritrea (The Association for Civil Rights in Israel). These asylum seekers fled from Eritrea due to the dictatorship regime present in the country; the draft in Eritrea is equated to slavery by several human rights organizations, and the punishment for defecting from the military is torture or the death penalty (Hotline for Refugees and Migrants).

Asylum seekers in Israel do not qualify for social services or financial assistance, due to the administration's immigration policies.

Eritreans in Haifa

Haifa contains a small, but growing, community of Eritrean asylum seekers. Estimates on the numbers of Eritreans living in Haifa range from 250 – 500 individuals

Many Eritreans in Haifa work low-paying jobs that demand long hours. Due to the long hours at work, Eritrean children are typically cared for in informal "daycares" that neighborhood women run out of their homes. Eritrean children face challenges in their education due to the language barrier and lack of support outside of school.



A Mother-Child Support Group

A mother-child support group was created for the Eritrean community in July 2018. This group's objective was to create a space for self-care for the mothers and an educational and recreational space for the children.

In order to create a space for self-care and community building, the women each week completed a simple craft together. The women learned how to weave bracelets, create homemade dolls, and put together a 'culture book'. The craft was guided by me, the student facilitator, and volunteer translators. The community members also helped each other in translating directions and putting together the crafts. The younger children had free time to play and explore the room with volunteers, which had stimulating toys for younger children, such as a ball pit and baby dolls. The older children had structured activities with volunteers, including crafts, coloring, balloon animals, and practicing Hebrew through fun activities.

Haifa Municipality Department of Community Social Work

The Department of Community Social Work is responsible for creating projects and groups in each of the city's neighborhoods. The Department is limited in the amount of aid they can provide to asylum seekers (due to legal status). However, through the service of interns, the Department occasionally offers groups and other projects to benefit this community. My group (Mother-Child) may be continued in October 2018 by Israeli students.

Outcomes

- Participants learned five low-cost crafts that can be utilized as self-care practices.
- 10 children received 7.5 hours of Hebrew language practice through activities and worksheets.
- Participants nurtured relationships with other community members and created contact with Municipality social workers.

Skills Utilized

This project required me to practice problem solving, coordination, and facilitation skills.

- **Problem Solving:** The model for this project was passed on to me by two nursing students, who had held their own groups prior to my arrival. Their model was based on parent education, safety topics, and how to make homemade toys. However, after the first meeting, I felt that the model should be adjusted to better suit the participants and be easier to facilitate in English.
- **Coordination:** As the project relied on volunteers for child-care, I had to continually coordinate with Municipality staff and volunteers in order to ensure the sessions would have sufficient volunteers.
- **Facilitation:** I guided the women through the crafts which required me to speak clearly, slowly, and concisely.

Classroom Connections

My Community and Social Systems (CSS) courses provided me a framework for engaging with the asylum seeker community. Additionally, global courses, such as SW 648, prepared me for working and living abroad. I found myself reflecting on conversations in these classrooms while working with global populations in Israel.

Lessons Learned

This summer has taught me several lessons about international social work practice.

- The first of these lessons is the importance of clear communication, especially when a language barrier is involved.
- The second lesson is the importance of building relationships and teams.
- The third lesson is the importance of being humble and realistic. I was here only for three months. I cannot "solve" any of these problems permanently. Instead, my projects can bring the participants some benefits, and I can advocate for the projects to continue in the future.



Career Connections

This experience has allowed me to learn so much about social work practice in an international context. I look forward to applying these skills and lessons to my future career as a macro social worker. I hope to work in a domestic position serving refugees and immigrants. This first hand experience with an asylum seeker population has shown me that this work moves slowly but can have great impact.

Advice

- Make sure you spend time developing relationships with colleagues and community members! Not only will you gain greater insight into the country, but relationships are essential for accomplishing your project's goals.
- Practice self-care daily while abroad, and don't let homesickness get the best of you. Your time abroad will go by so fast, so enjoy it!

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