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Using Interprofessional Collaboration to Assist Refugees

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Recommended Citation

Hoekstra, Hannah E., "Using Interprofessional Collaboration to Assist Refugees" (2023). *Social Work Masters Capstone Projects*. 16.

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Capstone:

Using Interprofessional Collaboration to Assist Refugees

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SWK 895: Integrative Capstone

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May 7, 2023

Using Interprofessional Collaboration to Assist Refugees

Abstract

This capstone will demonstrate my competency and ability to use interprofessional collaboration with the nine Eastern Kentucky University (2022a) Master of Social Work (MSW) program interprofessional social work practice competencies. I will begin by describing my practicum setting and learning goals (EKU, 2022b) for the MSW program, as well as the two sub-groups within the agency I primarily worked with. Next, I will do a literature review of previously researched interprofessional collaboration with the two sub-groups, before demonstrating my practice of the nine competencies using my practicum experiences. I will then finally end with evaluating the effectiveness of interprofessional collaboration that I witnessed during my practicum.

Practicum Setting

My practicum setting was with a local non-profit agency in Greensboro, North Carolina that assisted refugees called New Arrivals Institute (NAI). The goal of NAI is to promote and encourage self-sufficiency for refugees and their families, though a variety of services offered by the non-profit. Among these services are English classes, case management, school impact program, childcare/daycare up to the age of 10, health education, on-site nurse, citizenship classes, and mental health referrals. During my time at NAI, I worked primarily with the school impact program and case management team. For the first half of the practicum, I was assigned to work with the school impact program, and for the latter half was assigned to assist with case management team.

With so many services offered, there is no shortage of potential interprofessional collaboration occurring at NAI. While I was with the school impact program, the primary interprofessional collaboration that occurred was with various school system administrators and educators, as the program's main focus was on school aged children and their families. With case management, most of the interprofessional collaboration occurred with other groups at NAI, main resettlement agencies, and various individuals from Department of Social Services (DSS), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid.

Literature Review

Often considered a niche population to work with, many of the available articles that have done research into working with refugees are often centered in another country, such as Australia, New Zealand, or a refugee camp in a neighboring country of the individual's home country that they are fleeing. I was, however, able to find a few that provided examples of various interprofessional collaboration with connection to the services provided by the two programs I worked with.

School Impact Program

Arvanitis (2021) compiled research that had been done into providing education to refugee children, including several suggested practices for educators and school systems to utilize. One suggestion was to recommend engaging the refugee students and families with the learning process, such as families and students sharing any cultural or cognitive knowledge with educators that may help the students with academic success (Arvanitis, 2021). This is something that I observed during my time with the school impact program, as often the staff members of the program acted as bridges between refugee families, teachers, and other school officials. Another

suggestion included encouraging refugee students to share information about their culture with classmates and to encourage intercultural dialogue in the classroom with the goal to help students adjust to their new life (Arvanitis, 2021).

Arvanitis also found that there are many barriers to successfully educating refugee children. Some cultures do not have a large emphasis on education, with children for various reasons in their home country either dropping out of school or often not attending school. This was also something that I encountered while working with the program as some of the older refugee children would simply not attend school, leading to the program to intervene and explain to students and families the importance of attending school, as well as truancy. It was also discovered that there are large gaps in academic achievements and opportunities when comparing refugee children to other children (Arvanitis, 2021). Many educators mentioned that they had challenges finding textbooks and curriculum that would work for refugee children, who often were behind their peers in terms of educational level (Arvanitis, 2021). To help overcome those barriers, Arvanitis suggested that there should be lesson plans that are specifically tailored to assist refugee students with where they currently are in terms of education level.

Kostouros, et. al. (2022) discussed the interest from teachers and educators in learning more trauma informed care and trauma informed teaching to better assist their refugee students. Many teachers and educators found that they are often a first point of contact for refugee students, due to the amount of time that is spent in the classroom, causing many students to trust the teacher or educator and see them as someone it is safe to confide in (Kostouros, et. al., 2022). Some students reported feeling that their school environment is not as supportive of their trauma, and that for many students, their experiences in school have a large impact in how they view their new country and how easy it is for them to resettle (Kostouros, et. al., 2022).

Case Management Team

One intriguing aspect of my practicum placement with NAI's case management team was that none of the members had a specific background in the field of social services, counseling, or other similar fields that often lead to case work. Shaw (2014) found that it is quite common for case workers with refugees to not have a professional background in social services. Many of the staff members of refugee resettlement service agencies are former refugees themselves and occupy a variety of resettlement roles: case workers, interpreters, education, and many more. Often, the former refugees use their similar background experiences to provide a unique understanding of the issues facing new refugees to provide peer support and act as advocates and mediators between the refugees and other resettlement staff members (Shaw, 2014). Interviews from case workers that are former refugees explain that they used their own experiences in resettlement as well as learning from colleagues, supervisors, and other resettlement staff members to inform their practice of case management (Shaw, 2014).

The latest service offered by NAI was mental health referrals. The case management team, if they felt that a client might need assistance with mental health, would go to the recently hired mental health professional to refer the client, where the mental health professional would then speak to the client in their office, with varying degrees of success. Many cultures have different viewpoints on mental health than current Western cultures, leading to difficulty establishing trust and openly conversing about mental health (Shannon, et. al., 2021). An interprofessional study found that successful refugee mental health referrals are the result of strong communication and key characteristics: scheduling initial appointments directly with mental health providers and ongoing communication between various providers – mental health, primary, and case workers (Shannon, et. al., 2021). Strong communication between professionals

is something that showed success at NAI for getting some refugee clients to begin to open up about various mental health issues resulting from traumatic experiences.

Applying the Interprofessional Social Work Practice Competencies

Demonstrate Ethical & Professional Behavior

The goal of the first competency is to ensure that during interprofessional collaboration social workers will be able to manage ethical dilemmas that arise from interprofessional collaboration to maintain the dignity and rights of clients as well as the effectiveness of the interprofessional team (EKU, 2022a). Primarily, ethical dilemmas can arise in a difference in professional code of ethics.

I encountered the educators code of ethics the most during my practicum, which was primarily made up of two principles: commitment to the student (helping each student realize their full potential) and commitment to the profession (National Education Association, 2020). The closest social work ethical value that matches with the educator's code of ethics is the service value, which states that a primary goal of social work is to help people in need as well as address social problems (NASW, n.d.). Where the potential ethical dilemma would arise is from the number of ethics that make up both professions – social work is more rigid with multiple ethics whereas educators appear to have more leniency as long as they demonstrate the two ethics.

Interprofessional social work also required a shared capacity to not only recognize how our professional values aligned but also how to engage in practices that expressed our shared values, before I switched from the school impact program to the case management team, I was

assisting with the annual summer program NAI does for children from ages 5-15 called Summer Literacy Arts Movement & Music program (S.L.A.M.M.).

The goal of the summer program was to provide a place for children of refugee families where the children were able to be watched so their parents could still attend English classes or go to work without worrying about their children. The school impact program were the primary staff members for the S.L.A.M.M. program with college interns and high school volunteers being the ones to usually interact with the children. For about 30 minutes to an hour each day (Monday-Friday) the children attended 'class' where they would learn about various subjects, from English skills to science to American holidays such as the 4th of July. The teacher for the 'class' was an individual who used to work at Doris Henderson Newcomers School (referred to as Newcomers by NAI staff; the local school specifically for children of refugee and immigrants) and would volunteer to be a teacher during the S.L.A.M.M. program.

The teacher demonstrated their commitment to the students by asking the volunteers, interns, and school impact staff members to walk around and assist any children with the lesson if they needed it as well as ensuring they were paying attention during the lesson. By engaging with the students as they needed assistance, I was helping the children on a micro level. Between the two of us and the others involved with S.L.A.M.M. we were able to gradually help some of the children bridge the gap in education between themselves and their peers. While we never talked directly about our shared professional values as part of our collaboration, it was clear that we needed to engage in shared activities to uphold our professional values that directly related to serving the students as part of our commitment to our professions.

Engage Diversity & Difference in Practice

Embracing diversity and differences is both an important part of social work and interprofessional collaboration. This includes respecting the unique cultures, values, and expertise of the other professionals, as well as those of the clients (EKU, 2022a). Working at NAI, I had the chance to work with many staff members who came from different cultural backgrounds – Afghanistan, Burma, and India. There was also a couple of English teachers who had originally been refugees, but I did not have the opportunity to find out exactly where they had originally come from.

Our clientele mostly came from Afghanistan as part of Operation Allies Welcome. One big difference between American and Afghanistan culture is the views on gender roles – Afghanistan culture is historically very patriarchal in nature, whereas American culture is seen as more equal between genders. These differences in views caused a minor culture clash at NAI as staff were realizing that it was primarily only male individuals that would show up for the English classes. From conversations with the husbands and speaking with the staff members and translators from Afghanistan, it was found that many of the husbands were having the wives stay at home to look after the house and children or were just not comfortable with having males and females in the same class together. A solution was presented to start an English class that was women only, and in addition to explaining the importance of women attending English class (should something happen to the husband, the wife can still take care of the children and house) the issue was resolved and there was an increase in women attending the women-only English class. The various staff members – case management team, English teachers, and heads of NAI – came together to discuss what could be done. Keeping in mind the cultural differences, it was suggested that if funding allowed, it was worth seeing how a women-only class would be received by clients. With some shuffling of other English classes around and additional hiring of

a female English teacher, the information about a women-only class was passed on to clients.

There were also interventions in the transition time by the case management team leads about the long-term benefits of both spouses learning English. When the women-only class finally began, many of the same women that had stopped showing up to English classes began attending once again.

Advance Human Rights & Social, Economic, & Environmental Justice

Advancing rights and justice while working with an interprofessional team includes supporting the interprofessional collaboration while maintaining human rights and to communicate the importance of using policies, programs, and practices in teamwork to advance social, economic, and environmental justice (EKU, 2022a). This can include remaining aware of political events that would impact refugees and educating the other professional team members on the differences of working with refugees.

One of the very first things that NAI has any staff, intern, or volunteer applicants do during orientation is to research and familiarize themselves with the issues and culture of the countries our clients originated from. Usually, this was Afghanistan, but there were also quite a few refugees who had fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Burma. The research into the culture and problems was designed to provide background for interactions with clients and to keep updated on international events that may potentially affect clients that do not necessarily make the national evening news.

In Greensboro, there are often different festivals that are held throughout the year, where organizations could rent table space to interact with festival patrons. NAI will usually rent a

stable space at a festival in the spring and fall, with the goal being to educate the public on refugees and to try and gather support since NAI is a non-profit and relies on donations and grants. The school impact program will also hold a mini get together in the summer in coordination with Newcomers and some other Guilford County schools where refugee children and families can come to learn more about the school year and to meet some of the teachers and school staff members that will be teaching the children. The goal was to familiarize the local school staff with the differences in culture and the unique needs of refugee families.

Engage in Practice-Informed Research & Research Informed Practice

Research-informed practice and practice-informed research with interprofessional collaboration includes using research to inform and develop the interprofessional team and using one's knowledge of interprofessional team members to translate research into improving related practice, policy, and service delivery (EKU, 2022a).

Working with other interns in the case management team, I discovered that the interns chosen by the lead case manager were from many different disciplines. The two other interns I closely worked with were BSW students from one of the local universities, but many past interns had been pursuing a degree in public health. A common task assigned to interns was a monthly presentation that would be given to all clients, split into two different presentations based on the client's proficiency with English – a 'beginner' and 'advanced' presentation. One aspect of the presentation was a pre-test and post-test designed to gauge the client's existing and retaining knowledge of the subject of the presentation. When I was with the case management team, my role during presentations was to record the results of the two tests.

Depending on the client's English proficiency the method of recording the results were altered. For those with no or little proficiency – 'beginner' presentation – the clients were divided into groups depending upon their native language. Translators would then verbally translate the presented slides and questions to the clients. The way I recorded the results in this case was to use a series of true-false questions and have clients raise their hands if they answered 'true' or 'false' to the question. For the 'advanced' presentation – intermediate or high proficiency – a paper copy of a multiple-choice quiz was distributed to the clients, and at the beginning and end of the presentation the quizzes were collected, and results compared. Often, there was an improvement between the pre-test answers and the post-test answers, though it did become clear after a couple presentations that there were likely some discrepancies with the answers for the 'beginner' level presentation.

While this was an easy and immediate way to determine the effectiveness of intervention, there were limitations in the quality of data collected. In some of the classes, there were many different translators needed for everyone to be able to understand the presentation, which likely provided a distraction because of so much talking occurring at the same time. It is also likely that some of the responses were only given as a result of peer pressure – such as one person in the group said that they believed the answer was 'true' or 'false' and the rest of the group automatically went along, even if they otherwise may have thought the correct answer was the opposite of the group's collective answer. When the presentations were over and the case management team convened to discuss the presentation, the potential for the data to be inaccurate was brought up and acknowledged but there was no definitive solution brought up, due to the limited time for presentation (one or two days out of the month) and the various translations needed for the 'beginner' level presentation.

Engage in Policy-Practice

Policy-practice with an interprofessional team includes engaging in problem-solving to address policies, assessing how the team members respond to policies, and how the interprofessional team members interpret the policies for the well-being of clients (EKU, 2022a).

Part of working with the refugee school impact program was helping ensure that the local school system followed the McKinney-Vento Act. The resettlement process for refugees is often complicated and hectic in the beginning. One thing that is hectic and often changes is where a refugee and their family are staying. At first, the refugees will be set up in transitional housing that is coordinated by the resettlement agency, the city/county, and landlords, but often this housing is not permanent housing. For refugee families with school-aged children, not having a permanent address would usually be seen as a huge barrier to the enrollment process in a local school. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, however, bypasses those issues by allowing children that are homeless or without a permanent address to attend their local public school (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). McKinney-Vento Act also requires public schools to immediately enroll students experiencing transitional housing even if they do not have school or immunization records, birth certificates, or other important documents (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Sometimes when contacting school administrators to begin assisting with the enrollment process for refugee children there would be issues with the enrollment process because either the program or refugee family was unable to provide specific types of documents that the administration was insistent were necessary to complete the process. Depending upon the documents that were being insisted upon, the McKinney-Vento Act would be referred to and a compromise was reached concerning the documents needed to complete the process. One common issue was the school administration –

particularly the transportation department – wanting a copy of a signed lease for proof of residence. Depending upon how long the clients have been in the United States, they are still living in transitional housing and do not necessarily have a signed lease that would satisfy the administration. There would be a back and forth but eventually the administration would accept any sort of proof of residence, including utility bills, as being sufficient enough for the enrollment process.

Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations & Communities

A goal of engaging clients while working with an interprofessional team is to develop a trusting relationship, communicate effectively to clients and the team, and perform effectively as an interprofessional team in a variety of settings (EKU, 2022a).

Essential information for effective team intervention when dealing with refugees is keeping in mind the differences in culture and how those differences may impact interactions with the clients. As mentioned earlier, there is a vast difference between Afghanistan and Western society when it comes to the viewpoint of woman. To someone who grew up in Western culture, the males of the family being the primary contact and often the ones who are working might seem outdated and misogynistic. When working with refugees, it is important to separate your own cultural views and opinions from your interactions. This also extends to ensuring that extended interprofessional team members keep in mind the differences in culture, especially educators, who may be unused to how refugee children act.

For example, while working with S.L.A.M.M. one of the overarching goals was to help build up the confidence of the girls so they would be more comfortable interacting with their male peers or teachers in the upcoming school year. The assigned teachers for the upcoming

school year were informed of the possible differences they may encounter working with refugee children, but it was suggested that to help the female children have a smoother transition in interacting with their peers, an attempt to build up their self-determination and confidence could only benefit the child.

One of the volunteers was a teenage girl from Afghanistan who had been providing translation services for NAI. My supervisor at the time took me and the other S.L.A.M.M. interns aside and tasked us with helping her build confidence. The interns and I, the school impact program staff, and the S.L.A.M.M. teacher would ask the teenager to assist us with tasks such as helping the children with their ‘schoolwork’ and include her in planning the next day or week’s activities. It was subtle but with time there was a noticeable increase in self-confidence in the teenager and she began to feel more comfortable with asserting herself, particularly to male peers.

Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations & Communities

Assessing clients in interprofessional collaboration includes developing mutually agreed upon goals and objects specific to clients and to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities of team members to inform and select the most appropriate intervention strategy (EKU, 2022a).

The school impact program would work with educators to develop an assessment that would help determine where the children were in terms of mathematics and literature. When the parents would meet with the school impact program to begin the enrollment process into both the program and a local school, the parents would provide information about the child’s educational background – their age, highest level they had completed, and how the child was in areas such as mathematics and literature. The parents’ answer would determine both the complexity of the test

administered as well as if myself or another individual would have to assist with reading the questions. The school impact program would then administer a test in mathematics and literature that matched the educational background provided by the parents.

Depending upon the results of the test and how long the school enrollment process would take, a plan would be developed between the school impact staff and interns to help teach the children while they were waiting to be enrolled in school. This was especially true for children that arrived towards the end of the current school year and would not be able to attend school until the new school year started the following fall. The plan included making copies of mathematical and literature worksheets that fit the child's current grade level and interns like me teaching the child. The resources for developing the plan and lessons were provided by education professionals and for those that needed further proficiency in English, old workbooks from ESL teachers were utilized.

Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations & Communities

As an interprofessional collaboration team, each professional member has specific role in interventions with clients that includes contributing and supporting the intervention to achieve beneficial outcomes (EKU, 2022a). There is also a responsibility to constructively manage any disagreements or problems that may arise when working with clients and has an interprofessional team (EKU, 2022a).

Towards the beginning of my practicum placement with the school impact program, there was an incident that occurred at one of the schools that required intervention from the school impact program. The family had a younger school aged child that was enrolled in one of the local schools, and as a requirement of public school system in North Carolina, the entire school had to

do a variety of safety drills, including fire alarm and lockdown drills. In this instance, the school was practicing a lockdown drill. For the student, the ordeal triggered PTSD memories. The child thought that the school was under attack and that they were in danger, causing the child to experience nightmares and insomnia in the days following the lockdown drill. The child's parents noticed, asked what was wrong, and after hearing the story, got in contact with the school impact program. The school impact program contacted the school and had a meeting with administrators and teachers, explaining how a routine drill may trigger PTSD in refugee children and giving advice for how to explain the drill to refugee children without triggering PTSD.

Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations & Communities

Evaluating interprofessional collaboration includes engaging in continuous professional and interprofessional development to enhance performance and collaboration and recognize limitations in skills, knowledge, and abilities (EKU, 2022a).

When a refugee child is enrolled in the school impact program, the child is typically enrolled all throughout their time in K-12 school, beginning when they enroll in the local school and when they either graduate or leave school. At the end of the current school year, the school officials will send over to the school impact program a brief transcript of the student's grades for that year that will be added to the client file. Depending upon how long the child has been enrolled in an American K-12 school, it is easy to look over previous grades and see if there have been improvements in grades or if they have stayed relatively consistent. The grades will provide a snapshot of what subjects the child may need extra assistance in, and the school impact program can develop a plan for the next school year with the teacher assigned to the child.

One thing that was consistent with both programs was that I did not get the opportunity to see how a case is closed. All the children I interacted with in the school impact program were too young to either graduate or drop out of school. Often after their initial needs were met by the case management team, it would be months or longer between clients showing up in the case management office, depending upon the needs the client had the current time, such as renewing SNAP benefits.

Effectiveness of Interprofessional Collaboration

Iachini, et. al. (2018) outlines a model made up of the components of interprofessional collaboration. The five components are interdependence, newly created professional activities, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, and reflection on process (Iachini, et. al., 2018).

Interdependence is the relying of social workers and other professionals on each other to accomplish their shared goals and tasks (Iachini, et. al., 2018). Both the school impact program and case management team relied on their respective interdisciplinary professionals to achieve the necessary goals and tasks for the clients. Without collaboration between the school impact program and school educators and administrators there would be less open communication between schools and refugee children's needs, causing refugee children to likely become discouraged and fall further behind in school. Without collaboration with various Department of Social Services employees and the case management team, clients would likely have a much harder time trying to navigate the bureaucracy to receive the SNAP benefits and Medicaid they need to live on. In terms of interdependence, both the school impact program and the case management team demonstrate effectiveness.

Newly created professional activities are the creation of new developments such as new protocols or structures resulting from interprofessional collaboration (Iachini, et. al., 2018). This area is where both the school impact program and the case management team have room for improvement. The various interprofessional collaborations for both programs were the same that they have been since NAI began, with the only exception being changes in a post-COVID-19 pandemic world. A potential inclusion that either program could implement would be brief weekly meetings with the other professional collaborators to discuss what improvements could be made to further help clients adjust to the resettlement process.

Flexibility is where the interdisciplinary professionals begin to pick up basic knowledge of the other profession (Iachini, et. al., 2018). With the school impact program, this manifested in the S.L.A.M.M. program and teaching the children while the children were waiting to be enrolled in school. Most of the actual teaching was left up to educators or other school officials that had the proper training but there had been enough picked up by the school impact program that they were able to teach children very rudimentary basics of mathematics and literature. The case management team, through collaboration with Department of Social Services, was able to answer basic questions and provide some knowledge of how the process for SNAP benefits and Medicaid worked but left the detailed explanation to whomever the client was assigned from the Department of Social Services or Medicaid office.

Collective ownership of goals is the collaboration and agreement on goals by all members of the interprofessional team (Iachini, et. al., 2018). The case management team would sometimes go months without seeing the same client so there was little opportunity to set interprofessional collaborative goals outside of the first couple meetings to ensure the clients were able to access SNAP benefits, Medicaid, and a form of permanent housing. However, the

school impact program was able to demonstrate the collective ownership component from frequent communication between the school officials and the school impact program staff that often included the school providing updates for the school impact program staff on how the children were doing in school, and the school impact program staff in turn would keep the school officials updated on any changes that were occurring in the child's life.

Reflection on process is the general reflection on the interprofessional collaboration itself (Iachini, et. al., 2018). This component is another area that both programs seem to fall short of. Interprofessional collaboration occurs in both the school impact program and the case management team but there seemed to be no reflection on the collaboration – the collaboration was something that occurred and was the best thing for the clients. For both programs, the lack of reflection on the process seems to be working but reflecting every so often – even just once a month – could likely help increase the benefits of collaboration for clients.

Overall, the school impact program and the case management team appeared to be effective for the clients, though there were areas for improvement, especially with interprofessional collaboration. For the most part interprofessional collaboration occurred and was successful for the beneficial of the clients but it appeared to be considered just a part of the job and did not result in many changes or reflection for either program.

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