

Office of Refugee Resettlement Refugee Program Employment and Economic Stability Promising Practice



International Rescue Committee Northern California Improving Outcomes for Refugee Women

In 2019, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Northern California¹ Refugee Career Pathways (RCP) Program implemented practices to increase enrollment and outcomes for women. This effort entailed an expansion of the nursing² and launch of an early childhood education program. These pathways build upon the formal and informal caregiving and education-related experiences that many of the agency's female refugee clients already possess.



Practice Description

The IRC Northern California RCP Program implemented new practices at its Sacramento and Oakland agencies to improve enrollment and outcomes for refugee women. To encourage more women to enroll, the agencies shifted to a more targeted outreach approach. For example, they reached out to certain community groups, posted success stories of refugee women on social media platforms, updated promotional materials to include images of refugee women, and coordinated with other agency employment programs to increase awareness and facilitate a smooth transition into RCP.

To focus on improving outcomes for refugee women, IRC Sacramento and Oakland revised their RCP service delivery models to incorporate career pathways in areas in which refugee women may already have experience. Agencies in both locations implemented an early childhood education program and expanded the nursing assistant certification program. Moreover, they established new partnerships and bolstered direct services to better support refugee women and increase their chances of obtaining certifications and employment in their chosen fields.

¹ The IRC Northern California network includes agencies in Oakland, Sacramento, San Jose, Turlock, and Modesto.

² A career pathway refers to a structured series of training and support services that enable individuals to advance in a career over time.



Need for the Practice

IRC Sacramento and Oakland faced challenges enrolling refugee women in career development programs. Their data showed that refugee women were not willing or able to enroll in programs, and those who did face significant barriers to employment. Moreover, IRC Sacramento and Oakland found that the primary barriers refugee women faced were low English language proficiency, lack of childcare options, limited work experience, not having a driver's license, and cultural and social norms that discouraged women from working outside of their home. As a result, these agencies decided to revisit its service delivery model to identify strategies to address this issue and improve employment outcomes for their female clients.



How to Implement the Practice

IRC Sacramento and Oakland described the following key steps to implement this practice:

- Develop long-term career action plans that may be used across multiple programs over several years. RCP staff partnered with other agency resettlement and employment programs to create a form that is used to help refugees set long-term career goals immediately following initial resettlement. IRC Sacramento and Oakland use this for interested refugees in their resettlement program, county or Matching Grant employment programs, and the RCP Program.
- Include career pathways where refugee women may already have some skills and experience (e.g., childcare, nursing, cooking, etc.)
- Establish partnerships that strengthen support for refugee women enrolled in RCP. The agencies collaborate with a variety of free and low-cost childcare providers, including those the refugee communities offer.
- Provide refugee women with skill-building resources and direct services to help address barriers. For instance, IRC Sacramento supplies driving manuals, connects clients to driving lessons, distributes a list of local childcare providers that refugee women use while they participate in classes, and assigns mentors who help improve English language proficiency.
- Educate training providers about the refugee community and encourage them to provide accommodations. For instance, the agencies work with their training providers to offer language support, allow extra study sessions, and extend deadlines on assignments requiring English language proficiency or more advanced digital literacy skills.



Preliminary Results

IRC Sacramento and Oakland provided preliminary output data used to inform changes to and measure the effectiveness of this practice. Specific examples include:

- Eighty-seven percent of refugee women participants entered employment in their career field.
- A 90 percent placement rate for refugee women who obtained a Certified Nursing Assistant certification.
- Refugee women represent slightly more than 90 percent of the participants in the nursing assistant pathways program.



Inputs/Resources

Agencies should expect to invest some funding and time to implement this practice. Below are key inputs and resources needed to adopt this practice.

- Data to understand enrollment trends and measure outcomes.
- Funding to cover training and certification costs.
- Community, education, and employment partnerships necessary to prepare refugee women for employment.
- Access to multiple social media platforms to conduct outreach and share information about the program.
- Driving manuals as well as financial support to cover fees associated with driving lessons, tests, and obtaining a license.
- Inventory of local childcare providers that may be accessible for refugee women.
- Volunteer mentors to meet with refugee women and help them achieve their career goals.



Contextual Considerations

Agencies should consider the following contextual factors that may impact implementing this practice.

While building career pathways in early childhood education and nursing has worked for IRC Sacramento and Oakland, agencies should establish career pathways that match the needs, interests, and experiences of the refugee women they serve.

IRC Sacramento and Oakland strategically engaged partner organizations in this effort. Each agency met with community organizations in their service area that could help with recruitment and with their training providers to discuss accommodations for their clients, such as extra time for assignments.

What is a Promising Practice? A promising practice is a unique and/or innovative approach, method, or technique that has demonstrated effectiveness and is replicable. ORR's Refugee Program primarily identifies potential promising practices during recipient and subrecipient monitoring and engages in a validation process to ensure the practice meets the standards to classify it as "promising." Each practice falls under one of the following domains: Physical and Behavioral Health, Employment and Economic Stability, Education and English Language, or Social Adjustment and Integration.