



Pathways to Self-Sufficiency: Successful Entrepreneurship for Refugees

Rowena Fong EdD, Noel Bridget Busch PhD, Marilyn Armour PhD, Laurie Cook Heffron LMSW & Amy Chanmugam LMSW and LCSW

To cite this article: Rowena Fong EdD, Noel Bridget Busch PhD, Marilyn Armour PhD, Laurie Cook Heffron LMSW & Amy Chanmugam LMSW and LCSW (2007) Pathways to Self-Sufficiency: Successful Entrepreneurship for Refugees, *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 16:1-2, 127-159, DOI: [10.1300/J051v16n01_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J051v16n01_05)

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1300/J051v16n01_05



Published online: 21 Oct 2008.



Submit your article to this journal



Article views: 1049



Citing articles: 11 [View citing articles](#)

Pathways to Self-Sufficiency: Successful Entrepreneurship for Refugees

Rowena Fong
Noel Bridget Busch
Marilyn Armour
Laurie Cook Heffron
Amy Chanmugam

ABSTRACT. This study examined the successes and challenges of refugee entrepreneurs by interviewing 50 refugees, service providers, and technical assistance providers. Qualitative data analyses revealed that successes and challenges occurred both at the individual and family levels as well as at the community and agency levels. The findings underscore the need to acknowledge the importance of the personal characteristics of the individual entrepreneurs, to deal with the competing factors revolved around family commitments, to encourage agencies to provide sufficient literacy and financial training, and to have community collaborations for capacity-building. doi:10.1300/J051v16n01_05 [Article copies available for a fee from *The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH*. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Refugees, refugee entrepreneurship, refugee employment, refugee service providers, refugee microenterprises

Rowena Fong, EdD, is Ruby Lee Piester Centennial Professor in Children and Families; Noel Bridget Busch, PhD, and Marilyn Armour, PhD, are Associate Professors; Laurie Cook Heffron, LMSW, is Project Director, Greenleaf Services, Center for Social Work Research, and Amy Chanmugam, LMSW, LCSW, is a doctoral student, School of Social Work, The University of Texas at Austin, TX.

Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, Vol. 16(1/2) 2007

Available online at <http://ecdsw.haworthpress.com>

© 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1300/J051v16n01_05

127

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing concern for some who live in America regarding government resources provided to immigrants and refugee populations, profiles of refugees who have achieved success with business ownership appear regularly in popular magazines and newspapers such as *Inc.*, *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *The New York Times*. A recent *Inc.* article profiled refugee clients of the Start Smart program in Portland, Maine, as successful small business owners (Dent, 2004). One refugee from the Congo owns a carpentry business; another from Cambodia opened a grocery store; a former surgeon from Somalia now runs his own translation business. Else, Krotz, and Budzilowicz (2003) assert that “refugee entrepreneurs are truly the genuine article. Like entrepreneurs everywhere, they are focused on measurable results, want fast and effective business development services, and are keenly interested in becoming self-sufficient” (p. 26).

U.S. census data provide descriptive sociodemographic characteristics of self-employed refugees and immigrants, as well as external conditions that appear to be favorable for business ownership (Raijman & Tienda, 2000; Toussaint-Comeau, 2005). Refugees and immigrants who own businesses are more likely to be married and emigrate from countries with higher rates of self-employment. Factors such as country of origin and cultural group, types of business typically owned, and educational attainment are other factors that influence rates of self-employment. Also, the longer a refugee or immigrant has been in the US, the more likely she/he is to be self-employed. Servon and Bates (1998) utilized census data and case studies from three microenterprise programs to review the potential of self-employment that move people from poverty to economic self-sufficiency. Their research indicated that successful small businesses are often associated with owners with higher levels of education, marketable skills, and personal economic assets.

Scholars in economics, psychology, and sociology have explored the pathways that lead to self-employment and entrepreneurship. Sociologists Edgcomb and Klein (2005) note factors that attract people or limit people in wage employment toward self-employment. Petrakis (2005) states that “entrepreneurial activation” occurs as the “combined result of macro level environmental conditions, which have economic or social origin, the characteristics of entrepreneurial opportunities and of human behavior that are related to entrepreneurial motives” (p. 233).

Several motivations for seeking self-employment have been proposed. Entrepreneurs may be pulled towards self-employment as a financial

buffer or wage income supplement, and by the desire to have an asset for their family members to inherit (Schreiner, 1999). The flexibility that small business owners have may be desirable because of family caregiving responsibilities (Schreiner & Woller, 2003; Sanders, 2004). The desire to work independently (Edgcomb & Klein, 2005) and unemployment and discrimination (Kupferberg, 2003) also pull people towards self-employment. Kupferberg (2003) hypothesizes that gender and immigration status may influence refugees' motivation towards self-employment. In particular, new refugees and immigrants and women are more likely to choose self-employment because of their marginal integration into the labor market. Rajzman and Tienda (2003) refer to the *blocked mobility hypothesis* that states that refugees and immigrants who anticipate or experience disadvantages in the employment market may choose self-employment.

Research on refugee self-employment and entrepreneurship has not adequately covered the successes and challenges of being employable. For many refugees, hardships of adjusting to America, finding English language classes, understanding the work environment in America, and having business and networking skills which would lead to successful and enduring self-employment and entrepreneurship have been major barriers to overcome. Since information about refugees' perceptions and experiences of what helped them become successful entrepreneurs is lacking, this research fills the gap by interviewing refugees, social service and technical assistance providers, and staff at community organizations about factors that make refugees entrepreneurs, contribute to successful entrepreneurship, and present challenges to refugee entrepreneurship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-employment and entrepreneurship appeal to many people and may hold special potential for those who have been disadvantaged in some way in the labor market (Edgcomb & Klein, 2005; Toussaint-Comeau, 2005). Schreiner and Woller (2003) describe entrepreneurship as "the oomph that drives sacrifice in the present in the hope of a better future" (p. 1575).

Contextual factors also contribute to refugee entrepreneurship. Market changes and opportunities may influence a person's movement towards self-employment (Edgcomb & Klein, 2005). Sociologists have described an "enclave effect," where in many members of a cultural group live and work in close proximity and thus provide each other with

same-language networks beneficial for employment experiences and for marketing (Raijman & Tienda, 2000; Toussaint-Comeau, 2005). Studies of contextual and cultural factors in immigrant and refugee business ownership have often focused on the experiences of particular groups in a specific region, for example, Soviet Jews and Vietnamese entrepreneurs in California (Gold, 1992), Mexican and Korean entrepreneurs in Chicago (Raijman & Tienda, 2003), and Moroccan entrepreneurs in Amsterdam (Masurel, Nijkamp, & Vindigni, 2004).

The complexity of entrepreneurship in the United States led Schreiner and Woller (2003) to compare the successful entrepreneur to a decathlete who is capable of excelling in a wide range of areas. Individual characteristics that have been studied in entrepreneurs include cognitive factors such as risk perception and recognition of opportunities. Personality factors include motivation, conscientiousness, internal locus of control, confidence, desire for achievement, and flexibility (Certo & Certo, 2005; Kupferberg, 2003; Petrakis, 2005).

The research on the influence of social capital and human capital in entrepreneurship are mixed. Potocky-Tripodi (2004), in a multivariate survey of 2,336 immigrants and refugees in South Florida and San Diego, who were mostly from Latin American and Asian countries, found that social capital did not play a major role in their successful economic adaptation. Higher levels of educational attainment, citizenship, being male, and greater English proficiency were associated with more positive economic adaptation.

Ssewamala and Sherraden (2004) assert that technical assistance programs and institutions are key elements in the success of small businesses. Institutions facilitate success for low-income business owners by providing greater access to economic programs, incentives to save money, information about financial literacy, and technical assistance. Individual development accounts (IDAs) and microenterprise development programs are two vehicles for institutions to assist people with small business ownership.

Lessons and recommendations regarding refugee microenterprise program structures note the importance of integrating program staff with others in the organization providing refugee services (Else et al., 2003). Else et al. (2003) report that some agencies have addressed "internal anxiety as they served one constituency while excluding another," by securing additional funding to provide microenterprise services to a broader group, such as immigrants or low-income clients in general (p. 25). Program flexibility has assisted organizations with the challenges faced due to ever-changing refugee constituencies, specifically

by developing collaborations, employing diverse staff, and expanding their range of language abilities.

Collaborations play an important role by leveraging the resources of parties involved, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, and creating advantages for the organizations and their clients (Else *et al.*, 2003; Sanders, 2004; Woolcock, 2001). In discussing case studies of productive collaborative microenterprise relationships in several countries, Woolcock (2001) notes that “Neither states, firms nor communities alone possess the resources needed to promote broad-based, sustainable, welfare-enhancing outcomes; complementarities and partnerships forged both within and across these different sectors are required” (p. 196).

The research on entrepreneurship of refugees needs more knowledge from refugees, social service providers, technical assistance providers, and community organizations on the successes and challenges in becoming entrepreneurs. The present research addresses this issue by determining what factors contributes to refugees becoming successful entrepreneurs, and what barriers still exist to prevent them.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the successes and challenges of entrepreneurship that confront refugees living in Central Texas and to develop solutions for addressing these issues. The study was designed to gather information on entrepreneurship from refugees themselves, refugee service providers, community organizations, and technical assistance providers. The study addressed three broad research questions about refugee entrepreneurship:

1. What characteristics or factors make refugees entrepreneurs?
2. What factors or variables need to be in place to allow for entrepreneurship “success?”
3. What are the challenges to refugee entrepreneurship?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Ecological theory offers a framework of understanding how people behave in their social environment. Germain (1991) asserts that people behavior differently according to their social environments. This theoretical approach contributes to understanding why refugees coming to the United States may or may not become successful entrepreneurs.

Depending on their experiences in their home land environments, some refugees may be able to transfer those skills to a new environment; while others may not because of discriminatory challenges experienced in the new host country environment.

Saleeby (2006) offers another theoretical framework that is applicable to refugee entrepreneurs in his strengths perspective. Successful entrepreneurship is affected by the strengths of the refugees. Rather than classifying themselves as failures due to language limitations and lack of experience, refugees who have been and will continue to be successful are those who focus on their strengths and not on their shortcomings. Because the reinforcement of strengths is so critically important, the positive attitudes of refugee service providers and technical assistance providers is absolutely necessary.

METHODS

Sample Selection

Five groups participated in this study: (1) refugee entrepreneurs, (2) refugees and immigrants, (3) refugee service providers, (4) staff from community organizations, and (5) technical assistance consultants. Table 1 provides data on the participants by group. Study participants were recruited using purposive and snowball methods. Snowball sampling is a procedure in which current participants were asked if they knew anyone who might be willing to be interviewed and met the criteria. A majority of participants were residents of the Austin and San Antonio metropolitan areas, and others represented Houston, Boston, New York City, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. Most study participants were interviewed individually; however two focus groups of refugee and immigrant participants

TABLE 1. Interviews by Participant Category

Category	Number of Individual Participants
Refugee Entrepreneurs	6
Refugee and Immigrant Participants	27
Refugee Service Providers	9
Staff at Community Organizations	2
Technical Assistance Providers	6
Total	50

were conducted. The focus group method was used in order to more efficiently interview members of a mutual assistance association and a community cultural center.

Entrepreneur Participants

Refugee entrepreneur participants were selected based on one criteria, their past or present business ownership, and were identified several different ways. Catholic Charities of San Antonio and Green Leaf Refugee Services Program of Austin assisted the research team in identifying and recruiting potential refugee and immigrant entrepreneur participants. Other participants were identified directly by research staff, who approached local small business owners about participating in the study. Snowball sampling techniques described above were also used. The six ($n = 6$) individual refugee entrepreneur participants represented the following countries of origin: Cuba, Iran, Macedonia, and Nigeria. Participating refugee entrepreneurs owned the following types of businesses: restaurant, transportation contractor, and retail (convenience store and liquor store). The majority of refugee entrepreneur interviews were conducted in English. One interview was conducted in Spanish.

Refugee and Immigrant Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted with refugee and immigrant participants who were involved in business enterprises on a smaller scale, such as the selling of crafts that did not involve a specific business establishment. One focus group was conducted with eleven ($n = 11$) Somali Bantu members of a mutual assistance association. This was facilitated by the use of a language interpreter for Maimai, a native language of the Somali Bantu group. A second focus group was conducted with a cultural community center and included sixteen ($n = 16$) participants from Vietnam, Korea, China, Pakistan, Iran, Mexico, and Israel. Multiple interpreters were utilized during this focus group.

Refugee Service Provider Participants

Refugee service provider participants came from agencies that provide resettlement, educational, and mental health services to refugees. Service provider participants included nine individuals from Texas: Austin ($n = 4$), Houston ($n = 4$), and San Antonio ($n = 1$). The majority

of individual service provider participants were employed at resettlement agencies ($n = 7$).

Community Organization Participants

Staff at two community organizations that provide lending and micro-enterprise support services to local entrepreneurs participated. These organizations offered capacity and expertise specific to the Latino population of Central Texas, but do not have a refugee focus.

Technical Assistance Consultant Participants

Technical assistant consultant participants were referred by refugee service provider participants. Six ($n = 6$) participants were interviewed from statewide refugee offices, consultants, chambers of commerce, and service providers from Austin, Boston, New York City, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. These participants were selected based on their expertise in entrepreneurship, small business development, and local economic conditions. Others were chosen given best practices or innovations in refugee employment and training.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from participants by interview or focus group. Interviews and focus groups were conducted either in participants' offices, homes, or other public locations, depending on the preference of and convenience for the participant. All of the interviews except one were conducted in English. The remaining interview was conducted in Spanish by research staff. Language interpreters were used for the two focus groups. Funding was not available to pay professional interpreters. However, the interpreters utilized during the data collection processes had previous informal interpretation experience and appeared to have a good command of English and their native languages. The majority of interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. When participants declined audiotaping or in the event that audiotaping was not possible, researchers took detailed handwritten notes.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were designed for this study. A semi-structured questionnaire with 12 opened-ended questions was developed for refugee

and immigrant entrepreneur interviews. The questions focused around goals, initial and current barriers and challenges, resources and kinds of assistance needed and available, successes, employment history, and ability to assist family members and others.

A semi-structured questionnaire with 10 opened-ended questions was also developed for refugee service providers, community agencies, and technical assistance providers. The questions sought information about agency goals, needs and barriers for refugees, skills and strengths of refugees, programs currently offered or not offered, successful micro-enterprise projects, innovations in refugee employment programming, and cultural specific microenterpsie projects.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a modified grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). This is an iterative process in which interview transcripts were read and reread by members of the research team prior to coding. Each transcript was analyzed using line-by-line coding. Codes were grouped into themes. Themes specific to conditions and challenges to refugee employability were identified within and across transcripts. The research team collectively confirmed the results by reviewing them against the associated quotes from the transcripts.

FINDINGS

Data are organized into two sections: entrepreneurship success factors and challenges. Data are divided into themes related to individuals and families and themes related to the organizational and community level. This distinction is useful in identifying potential strategies and solutions for individuals and families and within the service delivery system.

Success Factors for Refugee Entrepreneurship

The majority (86%) of research participants ($n = 43$) described the many success factors, at both the individual and the community/agency level, that facilitate the development of refugee or immigrant-owned businesses.

Individual/Family

Individual and family success factors include six main themes: (1) personal characteristics and attitudes, (2) family-community orientation, (3) prior experience, (4) clarity of purpose, (5) language and communication, and (6) access to capital.

Personal characteristics and attitudes. Half (50%) of the total sample of research participants ($n = 25$) identified multiple personal characteristics and attitudes that reflect a strong entrepreneurial spirit among refugees. First and foremost is a commitment to hard work and openness to take on a challenge. Refugee entrepreneurs were willing to work double hours in order to get the business going or to hold another job to make ends meet in the interim. One entrepreneur worked a second job for the first five years after having opened a retail business. Another entrepreneur kept his restaurant open seven days a week and went without vacation for three years. The same entrepreneur completely remodeled a rental space in order to make it suitable for a restaurant and spent six months tackling governmental bureaucracy in order to change the zoning designation for his business. Because establishing a business can entail a slow and arduous process, the characteristics of reliability, patience, perseverance, and resilience are necessities. While many individuals would be discouraged by a bank's ridicule and denial of a loan application, entrepreneurs often have to persevere beyond such obstacles.

A tolerance for risk is another essential success factor among refugee entrepreneurs. In general, refugees are often keenly aware of and willing to take risks, given a history of risking their lives and livelihoods in search of human rights and personal safety. One participant reported that her husband, "risked everything in coming from Cuba here, swimming" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur). Another refugee entrepreneur stated that, "Here if you don't take risks, you don't win" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Refugee entrepreneurs also have leadership and innovation skills, or the ability to independently institute original and creative ideas. This includes a proactive, engaging outlook and a high level of resourcefulness in identifying solutions to barriers. One immigrant entrepreneur participant described this initiative by working for a convenience store in order to learn the trade and benefit from manager trainings before buying his own convenience store franchise. A community service provider further explained these qualities, "I don't think people can be taught to be entrepreneurs. They have to want to be entrepreneurs" (Community Service Provider).

Another service provider described the independent initiative demonstrated by refugee entrepreneurs, "For those that enter on their own, they are more independent and less afraid and more reliable. They just learn on their own if they want it bad enough" (Refugee Service Provider).

Participants identified confidence as another success factor for refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs. Success breeds success as entrepreneurs become aware of and respond to achievements and progress. One business owner acknowledged the pride he felt in having come from a different culture and successfully starting his own business:

You cannot help to be kind of proud coming from a different culture, different everything and come here. But you kind of come here and survive. Because it's hard. It's really hard. Because when I came here, I didn't know anybody. (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur)

Another success factor in refugee business ownership is flexibility and the openness, willingness, and ability to accommodate to changing conditions and needs. Participants reported taking on multiple roles within the business, willingness to take on debt despite cultural stigmas associated with debt, and starting over when one plan fails to materialize. One refugee family adapted to their new environment by opening a successful Mexican restaurant, despite being from the Middle East with a background in the jewelry industry.

Successful entrepreneurs also implement boundaries in order to have the business succeed and demonstrate recognition of and surrender to the reality of adverse conditions. One refugee family decided not to hire recently arrived relatives to work in the business, aware that it may cause undue tension in addition to presenting language barriers with customers. Another participant realized and accepted that he would be unable to work in his previous profession in physical education due to the language barrier and thus opted for starting a transportation business.

Other helpful characteristics identified by participants include: appreciating benefits received in the United States, having a sense of humor, being personable, keeping positive perspective in the face of adversity, being self-deprecating, and being trustworthy.

Family-community orientation. The research participants (42%) (n = 21) clearly described the family-community orientation of refugee entrepreneurs. This includes the ability to act as one family or community unit, a pre-eminence given to the collective need, and the recognition that common purpose supersedes individual preferences. A clear example of

this perspective is the mutual assistance association created by a group of Somali Bantu refugees, in which both individual and community survival and development were paramount.

Going into business as a family unit and collective decision-making are also attributes of successful refugee entrepreneurs. One family-owned business intentionally maintained a shared bank account, representing the communal nature of the business. Another restaurant was owned and operated by a family who equally filled all roles: cook, manager, wait staff, and janitor.

Entrepreneurs also rely on family and community networks and the ethos of intergenerational obligation and cooperation in establishing their businesses. For example, a Cuban man who is planning his own transportation company relied heavily on his wife's English and Internet research abilities in order to learn about licensing and permit requirements. He also accessed extended family who owned land where he stored large equipment and other family members in similar industries who offered advice about developing a customer base. Another family-owned restaurant benefited greatly from the assistance of an uncle who owned a restaurant in another city. He was able to spend several months helping navigate regulations, prepare the location, and create a menu. A Nigerian-born business owner belonged to a local Yoruba association, which enabled him to network with other Nigerian-owned business owners and to tap into the larger Nigerian community. A refugee entrepreneur described his networking activities in preparing to start the business, "Pure contact, talking with this one, and getting to know that one. And making connections with another. What does he do? How does he do it?" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

An integral part of the family-community orientation is demonstrated generosity towards others. Participating entrepreneurs revealed kindness and commitment to help other community members. One entrepreneur reported that once you have taken, "you have to give back. It's not an option" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur). Another participant was able to send money to his country of origin for the expensive educational costs of young relatives. One family struggled with assisting newly arriving family members while maintaining the business. Despite the challenge of balancing the two, the mother stated, "we are going to share what we have" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur). Another entrepreneur actively assisted other refugees in developing a small business and served as a mentor in helping others learn about the potential challenges and pitfalls of microenterprise. In addition, he was regarded as having successfully adapted to the United States and was sought by

refugees for assistance understanding mail and medical bills and avoiding scams. Another participant described being seen as a success and the resulting pressure to help others. He noted, "like one of my cousins told me, you are the God we see" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Prior experience. Another factor reported by some the interviewees ($n = 5$) in successful refugee entrepreneurship is a cultural or personal background that supports entrepreneurial activities and previous business knowledge that provides a base on which to build the business. The capacity to identify one's own strengths and skills and utilize those skills to direct the business model is also critical. Some refugees draw on already developed skills such as food preparation, farming, or sewing, which may not require additional education or highly developed language proficiency, to open their businesses or microenterprise endeavors. Others come to the United States from a generations-long history of working in family-owned businesses and are able to continue the same business or other type of business once they are resettled in the US. Participants described specific refugee communities, such as the Vietnamese community, that have capitalized on existing expertise in operating nail salons, for example. Participants also reported that having traditional work experience in the United States before engaging in micro-enterprise activities assists refugees in becoming familiar with the business culture of the United States and how to navigate regulatory systems.

Two participants were college-educated in the United States. One of those participants majored in business administration; however he reported that his business degree was not instrumental in preparing him for business ownership. Another participant worked in the computer industry before starting a restaurant, and this practical experience assisted his current ability to navigate the financial systems necessary to successful business start-up and operations. With or without formal education, necessary success factors include being financially literate and applying good business practices, such as developing a strong business plan and keeping profit-loss statements.

In general, refugees are also accustomed to the conditions involved in starting and operating a small business, given their prior history. This includes being used to working long hours and engaging in mutual help within the community. One participant also described her familiarity with operating as an outsider, as a member of a persecuted group in her country of origin. In some ways, this adversity assisted her in her ability to adjust to being a newcomer in a rural Central Texas town.

Clarity of purpose. Clarity of purpose represents another theme in successful refugee business ownership and refers to refugees' clear understanding of their own motivation and intentions in starting or expanding a business reported by some of the interviewees ($n = 5$). One entrepreneur explained that owning a small business is hard work and necessitates clear motivation, "So you have to know why you are in it, why you are doing what you are doing. And that's the only way you can keep going" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur). Another entrepreneur described his motivation for having started a small business, "One of the most widely noted purposes was the desire to independently and freely work for oneself without taking orders from others. My main motivator was not money, but that I hate looking for jobs. (laughter) I wanted to be independent" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Another motivation was the desire for growth, either in an existing business or in order to create job upgrade opportunities to avoid being stuck on the low end of the career ladder. One participant, in particular, demonstrated detailed and pre-meditated planning in achieving his business goals. By first working as an employee of a convenience store, he took advantage of the experience and training opportunities before purchasing and operating his own franchise convenience store. With the technical assistance readily available from the franchise, he was protected while building knowledge and experience about how to run a business. Subsequently, this entrepreneur created his own beverage retail store that he has now expanded to two locations.

Another participant noted that in some cultures, entrepreneurs focus on businesses in specific industries in order to build stability and in preparation for hard times: "In China, when they open the restaurant, the first thing is that they will never go hungry. Because if they don't sell food, they don't make it, they can still eat" (Focus Group Participant).

Another purpose associated with entrepreneurial activities is the benefit to mental health and well-being. Becoming a small business owner assists some refugees in feeling integrated and adapted to life in the United States. There is comfort and empowerment found in activities or work that refugees are confident and accustomed to doing. One entrepreneur noted that in working for oneself, "the mind is more settled. It's not that it's easy. It is not easy by any means. For some reason you feel more comfortable" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Additionally, participants reported that an orientation towards future generations and to provide assistance to the cultural community motivated them towards entrepreneurial activities. One refugee business owner reported that he wanted his children to have a secure future so

they won't have to struggle as he struggled. One group of refugees started a mutual aid association with the specific intention of helping one another financially and emotionally in adjusting to the United States and in providing educational opportunities for their children. Another entrepreneur suggested that he eventually hopes to give or sell his successful business to someone who will continue it. One participant revealed his desire to leave a legacy to his children: "I need to make my future now, because when I die I want my children to be secure. I don't want them to have to do the same thing I did" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

One participant stated that, "A true entrepreneur is never one that goes out to do things for money, because they want to be rich or make money. But those are there to fulfill a need that exists" (Refugee Service Provider). However, other participants reported that in addition to the multiple reasons listed above, they had started their own businesses in search of financial stability and success.

Language and communication. A clear success factor in refugee business ownership is the ability to communicate, and in the US, especially to speak and write English. Some participants ($n = 3$) reported having had good English skills before arriving in the Untied States or before starting their business. Those without solid English proficiency chose fields with limited public interaction or situations in which customers come to them and not vice-versa. In order to further manage the language barrier, one participant described the use of the Internet in establishing an international trade business. One participant noted that in addition to the necessary fluency in English, his ability to speak Serbo-Croatian assisted him in attracting local refugee customers from the former Yugoslavia.

Access to capital. Both a provider and successful entrepreneur who were interviewed ($n = 2$) described difficulty accessing traditional forms of financing and creativity in utilizing other avenues to fund their business proposals. One restaurateur was not accepted for a bank loan and was fortunate to draw on savings earned in a previous career. Another entrepreneur was able to negotiate favorable financing directly from the seller of a franchise, after being denied a traditional bank loan. The same entrepreneur intentionally chose to subsequently open a liquor store, because it didn't require considerable capital. The ability to save money was identified by one participant as a success factor familiar to refugees: "Refugees have a built-in lifestyle that says you must save money. Especially in societies that deal in cash, unlike us Americans

that deal in credit. Their whole thing leads to a more stable saving experience" (Refugee Service Provider).

Community/Agency

As reported by the majority (n = 41 or 82%) of the research participants, refugee entrepreneurship success factors at the macro level included six main themes: (1) access to human and financial resources, (2) strategic partnerships, (3) cultural and linguistic capacity, (4) outside support and mentorship, (5) assessment and clarity of purpose and (6) favorable conditions.

Access to human and financial resources. A success factor at the community level as reported by 16 out of the 50 participants (32%) is the ability of community organizations to secure stable and diversified funding in order to obtain space, provide loans to budding entrepreneurs, and boost culturally competent lending services and support. In addition, organizations must have the resources to continually develop volunteer capacity and the knowledge base of the staff. For example, a refugee entrepreneur participant reports, "You have somebody. You know. You have your representative who is always available. If you have problems, you just call him up."

Another vital human resource cited by multiple participants was the organizational leadership of a visionary who practices and demonstrates the same innovation and creativity sought among refugee entrepreneur clients.

Strategic partnerships. At the agency and community levels, strategic partnerships facilitate the success of innovations and entrepreneurial efforts of both refugees and refugee providers, as reported by 28% (n = 14) of the participants. This includes formal and informal collaborative relationships within the refugee provider community in addition to the combination of non-profit and for-profit, public and private, partnerships and investment. A microlender stated, "It's a great marriage of the for-profit worlds and not-for-profit worlds coming together and being able to use the whole financial literacy, economic development to serve the marginalized" (Community Service Provider).

Participants noted that building successful partnerships often involves striking a delicate balance of individual personalities. Thus, consortia and other alliances are dependent on the "right group of people" and on regular, intentional meetings, and communication. Some participants noted the benefit of forming written agreements describing the specific structure of the alliance and the responsibilities of each partner.

In fact, one participant stated that an outside facilitator is often useful in negotiating collaborative efforts and structures among organizations.

Participants also identified the importance of including traditional leadership structures and cultural organizations in strategic partnerships. In areas that have strong and established refugee communities, there may be multiple opportunities to gain insight and expertise about the needs and strengths of a cultural community. Among groups that are in the beginning stages of forming organized associations, partnerships with established community organizations are equally important. Mutual assistance associations are a good example of the leverage created by a cohesive community network joining forces with one or more established community organizations. Another provider mentioned the idea of creating a networking group among refugee small business owners, “We have a man that wants to do a flooring business. He did floors in his country. He’s Bosnian. And we have another man that wants to do windows. He’s from the Mideast. And there’s different people that want to do different things. We think there can be a referral possibly, or through leads that they get that don’t work for them that might work for someone else” (Refugee Service Provider).

Cultural and linguistic capacity. The linguistic capacity of agencies serving refugees and potential refugee business owners is an important success factor emphasized by 16% (n = 8) of the sample. Refugee service providers often employ multicultural and multilingual staff or utilize volunteer or professional interpreters.

A provider explains about tracking the refugee clients, “And we used our translation department so we could send those [surveys] out in 5 languages.”

It is helpful for microenterprise and small business development organizations and financial institutions to develop linguistic capacity beyond Spanish. Another community-wide success factor related to refugee entrepreneurship is a widely available range of options for English as a Second Language, including job-specific, survival, and advanced tracks.

Assessment and clarity of purpose. At the macro level, successful refugee entrepreneurship is facilitated by the proper identification of and focus on the needs associated with growth, development, and innovation stated some (n = 3) of the participants. As is the case with individual entrepreneurs, an agency’s or community’s awareness of limits also facilitates entrepreneurship. This includes the ability to identify agency priorities and strengths and then develop appropriate plans. For example, one participating provider described an agency decision not to diversify

in order to maintain the focus and strength of currently successful programs. Likewise, in identifying the strength and skill sets of refugee populations, agencies, and community organizations can direct entrepreneurial activities accordingly. For example, one provider described her awareness of beading and basket weaving skills among a new refugee group and subsequent steps taken to create a responsive micro-enterprise collaborative.

Deliberate goals of microlenders, in particular, include the investment in human capital, job creation, and the attempt “to target businesses that create jobs for more people” (Community Service Provider), and a positive economic impact that ripples outward from individuals, families, and the community at large. Organizations involved in microenterprise assistance also strive to be socially responsible stewards of the careful investments made by funders and donors and to increase the financial literacy and integration of marginalized populations. One microlender explained their mission to guide low-income entrepreneurs toward conventional systems and financial institutions, “Part of our mission is to obviate the need for us. Right? Because then hopefully everyone can get a loan with a regular bank” (Community Service Provider).

Outside support and mentorship. As reported by some participants ($n = 3$), entrepreneurs looked to outside assistance and mentors for support while establishing their businesses. Many maintained steady employment and/or relied on the earnings of family members in order to make ends meet during the initial and uncertain stage of start-up. Some participants also relied on public assistance programs, such as food stamps, Medicaid, and government housing, while pursuing entrepreneurial activities.

Entrepreneurs received technical assistance from refugee resettlement agencies by referrals to the Internal Revenue Service and, in one case, a pro bono attorney. Other sources of support and technical assistance included governmental entities that assisted with registration, permits, and licensing. A nascent mutual assistance association benefited from technical assistance provided by a federally contracted mentor, who assisted during the planning stages of the association. A restaurant owner described his experience seeking the appropriate permits and licenses from the City of Austin:

I went so often to the city of Austin, downtown, they thought I was an employee there (laughter). . . . And one lady . . . she was very good. She was the one that told me what to do, where to go next. So after that, it took me like two months and I got a certificate of

occupancy, I think it is called. And then we passed all the requirements from the city. It is a very grueling process. . . . But it worked out. It was good. The city was very helpful I have to say. Because they usually, they said I had to wait 6 months to get the certificate. I said wait a minute. I am already paying for rent. I already got the place. And he was like, well. He actually sped it up really fast. So they were very good to me, I have to say. (Refugee/ immigrant Entrepreneur)

Entrepreneurs also looked to role models and business contacts for guidance and mentorship. Some participants had family members that served as role models, and others tapped into outside sources of counsel. One refugee entrepreneur described using his family network in order to improve his employment situation before eventually starting his own transportation business:

Me, I didn't drive trucks when I arrived. I cleaned offices. And from there, my cousin got me a job removing asbestos, with a mask and a suit and I don't know what else. And I worked in Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, wherever. And I did it for four years. And from there I began, my brother got his truck driving license. He came to the US later, but it was him that got his license first even though I had been here three years longer than him. He got his truck driving license and began driving a truck. And I was like, what's going on? How is it? And he said go get your license, and I will find you a job. So I went. I left the asbestos and everything. So then after my brother left the trucks, I stayed with the trucks. My brother went to drive cement mixers. I said, what's that? There is a lot of money, but too much work. You don't sleep. You are always on the road, but there you will earn. OK, so what I want is to earn this money. So I went to these trucks, and now it's been six years driving them. (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur)

One participant recommended third-party guidance for new arrivals, as opposed to a peer mentor model. She stated that some newly arriving refugees may distrust the counsel of established refugees, assuming that success has tainted their intentions.

Favorable conditions. A few participants ($n = 4$) described several conditions that promote a favorable environment for refugee-owned businesses. First of all, refugee microenterprise follows in the footsteps of a great history of economically wealthy small businesses and immigrant

entrepreneurship. Likewise, there exists strong bi-partisan support for micro lending and small business development among low-income and minority communities.

Social trends toward specific products can also be beneficial to refugee entrepreneurs. Two refugee providers in the planning stages of developing a traditional handcraft co-operative arrangement with newly arrived refugees identified the favorable interest in global handcrafted goods as a factor in the potential success of such an endeavor. Another example is a Minnesota organic farming initiative that utilized the vigorous market for organic produce to leverage existing agricultural skills among refugees.

On a regional level, one entrepreneur cited a community campaign to boost support for small, family-oriented and locally owned businesses as an advantage in his area. Recognition by outside sources and free advertising represent other external circumstances conducive to success. One restaurant owner was reviewed favorably by a local newspaper and experienced a substantial increase in business as a result. The same participant remarked that a complete lack of competition among restaurants from his country of origin also factored in his success.

Challenges to Refugee Entrepreneurship

Research participants discussed the multiple challenges to refugee entrepreneurship. Some challenges inhibit the initial development of a small business, while others inhibit existing refugee-owned businesses. Challenges can be understood as individual barriers faced by individuals and families and external barriers faced by the agencies and communities at large.

Individual/Family

Participants identified eight themes related to challenges facing refugees as they plan, start or grow a small business: (1) language and communication, (2) stressors, (3) lack of knowledge, (4) lack of support resources, (5) competing factors, (6) financial literacy and access to capital, (7) cross-cultural challenges, and (8) business demands.

Language and communication. This challenge was reported by a little more than three-quarters (76%) of the persons interviewed (n = 38). Similar to language and communication challenges affecting refugee employability, pre-literate refugees and those with limited English proficiency need considerable assistance in understanding the magnitude

of documentation required to own a small business. As a technical assistance provider observed, "They pretty much have no exposure to Western culture at all . . . and the biggest challenge for them is that they are illiterate or pre-literate."

Other examples of problems in language and communication were inaccessibility of language services, difficulties in interpretation and translation, and inappropriate levels of language placement.

Stress. There are many stressors that challenge the refugee entrepreneurs as stated by 76% (n = 38) of the participants. Upon resettlement, refugees must adapt to a new culture and language and become self-sufficient. Starting and running a business undoubtedly creates additional tension and a sense of insecurity. For example, some refugees continue to suffer monthly crises over being able to afford rent. Other sources of stress include: paying for various business-related applications for permits without the security of its acceptance, deciding when to leave a job in order to focus fully on the new business, and the lack of health insurance for self and family members. Dealing with the social isolation of living in a community of people from other cultures and other languages can also cause emotional stress. One entrepreneur participant described the fatigue that contributed to his high level of stress. Beginning his own transportation business, he works long hours and often functions on a few hours of sleep per day. Concerned about causing a fatal accident, he stays awake with cigarettes and coffee and readily admits, "I am killing myself" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Lack of knowledge. Study participants (66% or n = 33) reported a general lack of familiarity with the United States system regarding how to open and run a business as a barrier. These processes differ from country to country and one participant noted that in some countries, such as Cuba, private business ownership simply does not exist. Entrepreneurs must learn how to enter the system and how to navigate financial institutions and governmental entities, which may require multiple visits to take care of administrative paperwork. Specific areas of concern identified by participants included: zoning; qualifying for bank loan; writing a business plan; budgeting; health inspections; appropriate certificates, licenses, and permits; environmental regulations; and city, state, and federal taxes. In describing his lack of knowledge about the necessary systems, one participant stated that, "if you don't have someone that gives you an in, or where to go, how to do it, it is difficult" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur). Another entrepreneur stated, "I don't know which place we need to be getting help from" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Lack of support resources. The supporting resources necessary to back up and sustain a business are often lacking or difficult to access for refugee entrepreneurs declared two-thirds (66%) of the participants in the total sample. Again, transportation and child care were two common obstacles identified by participants. Learning how to drive, obtaining a driver's license, and buying a car are also obstacles. In addition to the difficulties of affording child care, refugee cultures are often uncomfortable with the notion of children being cared for by people other than the mother or female relatives. Likewise, participants identified the following support resources that are often lacking: finding and sustaining employment while the business is established, locating assistance with immigration processes such as applying to adjust status to permanent resident, and legal, tax, and accounting technical assistance. Identifying and accessing positive mentors can also be challenging for new entrepreneurs. Successful business owners in similar fields are reluctant to share information for fear of losing business to new competition. One participant stated that, "nobody wants to give you the correct information, how to do it, or you'll take their business" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Competing factors. Twenty-two study participants (44%) identified multiple conditions that compete with the business for entrepreneurs' attention. Refugee entrepreneurs struggle to balance the business' survival with their own individual survival and that of their family. They feel a strong responsibility to support and spend time with their families, including immediate family, newly arriving family members, and support relatives in their countries of origin. Entrepreneurs often juggle other traditional jobs as their business is established. One couple planning a new business described the juggling act and risk involved in maintaining family stability while embarking on a new venture: "We don't have a solid plan yet due to the insurance and everything, because we have children. We cannot be without a house and lose everything" (Refugee/immigrant Entrepreneur).

Financial literacy and access to capital. Refugees' understanding of financial matters necessary to starting and running a business in the United States is limited, as is their access to the capital often required to start a business reported 20 out of the 50 participants (40%). In addition to solid business proposals, collateral, and good credit scores required to obtain a bank loan, and funds are needed to pay living expenses (if traditional employment is not ongoing), submit applications for registrations, licenses and certifications, health insurance, attorneys, and accountants. Refugee entrepreneurs often lack both the financial literacy and the

financial means to overcome these challenges. Some of the Southeast Asian participants admitted they had difficulties "understanding the bank system and the culture of [doing] business."

In addition, participants reported that some cultural barriers exist to the idea of holding debt in order to establish and maintain good credit in the US. Among Asian cultures, in particular, having a debt is highly stigmatized. Study participants also reported that some refugees may be resistant to using cosigners in seeking loans.

Cross-cultural challenges. Forty percent ($n = 20$) of the participants reported cross-cultural challenges. One of the challenges refugee business owners face is a difference in business culture. This includes cross-cultural variations about men's and women's role in business and the workplace, diverging perspectives of time and appointment punctuality, and other social norms. One participant reported that, at first, smiling to customers of her restaurant business seemed quite unnatural and even immoral to her. In her country of origin, smiling to unknown men is considered flirtatious. She came to understand that in the United States, smiling to incoming patrons was a necessary part of marketing and welcoming new customers to her restaurant.

Another cross-cultural challenge affecting entrepreneurs is that many refugee populations have a family orientation as opposed to an individualistic mindset. Thus, the business climate is generally set up for individuals rather than families. This can create hardships for entrepreneurs supporting an extended family and struggling with family separation.

Unfortunately, refugee entrepreneurs also face discrimination based on race or ethnicity. One study participant suggested that inequalities exist within governmental support for minority business development, in that some racial and ethnic minorities are targeted for federal assistance, while other minority groups are ineligible. For example, as one of few Eastern European entrepreneurs in the Central Texas area, he was ineligible for federal minority-owned business assistance, whereas immigrants from South Asia were encouraged to apply for and receive such assistance.

Another participant noted a very serious difference between his culture of origin and the business culture in the United States regarding the rules and regulations of the city, state, and federal governments. This entrepreneur reported that in his country of origin, corruption and flexibility in the system results in business owners occasionally ignoring rules and regulations, with few or no consequences. However, this participant reported that playing by the rules in the United States is an essential part of doing business.

Business demands. In addition to the demands of family and second jobs, refugee entrepreneurs face the demands of the business they are attempting to start or maintain, as reported by an entrepreneur participant. This includes the need for near-constant physical presence and supervision, negotiating with business partners, marketing and advertising the business, hiring and managing employees, and storage and maintenance of materials and equipment.

Community/Agency

Research participants reported five broad themes in discussing the external challenges to refugee entrepreneurship: (1) language and communication, (2) unfavorable conditions, (3) human and financial capacity and priorities, (4) community and mainstream resources, and (5) risk tolerance.

Language and communication. At the community or agency level, services are not often available in languages spoken by refugee communities from Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, or Ethiopia, for example. This concern was raised by 24% (n = 12) of the study participants. Microenterprise technical assistance and preparatory classes are frequently only available in English and occasionally in Spanish. Likewise, language interpreters are rarely utilized.

Unfavorable conditions. Clearly, outside factors, such as the economy, can affect the success of all small business owners, not simply refugees, explained nine interviewees (18%). Likewise, racial and ethnic prejudices and recent anti-immigrant sentiments can affect the success of refugee-owned businesses.

Starting a small business is a long and involved process. It is not often chosen as the path to economic success by those born in the United States. Likewise, it is not the universally appropriate pathway for arriving refugee families. For those who do choose to launch a business, prior employment experience in the United States is highly encouraged by refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs and those working with refugees. The challenges and success factors described above by research participants must be taken into account when assessing entrepreneurial potential for newcomers.

Human and financial capacity and priorities. Federal policies, structure, and timelines involved in refugee resettlement program also serve as barriers to early entrepreneurship efforts among refugee service providers reported six participants (12%). The push for early employment and self-sufficiency prevent providers from using their resources to develop

microenterprise programs or to seek partnerships with others who are already providing mainstream microenterprise services. There exists very limited federal funding to support refugee-specific small business development activities, and this funding is not currently available in Central Texas.

Refugee service providers lack adequate training to refer clients to local microenterprise services or do not have the time to do so and need to address other more immediate needs of refugee clients. This barrier inhibits refugee providers from serving as mentors or sponsors in the business development process, and essentially calls on refugee clients to search for alternative support. Likewise, microenterprise and small business development organizations lack understanding of the strengths and needs of the refugee community and, therefore, are not actively recruiting them to their technical assistance programs.

One technical assistance provider noted that *building* capacity is not equivalent to *buying* capacity. Instead of staff development and true financial literacy on the part of refugee service providers, non-profit organizations often consider hiring a grant writer to bring in more funding as the sole step in building capacity. In other words, the simple addition of a new grant stream may not translate to broadly increased capacity. Rather, increased funding must be accompanied by an increase in the knowledge and diversity of experience and expertise represented among staff. Without the broader capacity-building, new funding streams may not be effectively or efficiently utilized.

Community and mainstream resources. At the agency level, four participants (8%) stated that the focus on immediate and urgent needs in addition to overwhelming caseloads inhibits the awareness of and utilization of mainstream microenterprise and technical assistance services. Refugee service providers report that they do not know where to refer clients who have an interest in starting their own business, nor do they have the time to educate themselves about potential resources.

Among participants who were aware of community resources, these services were reportedly not suitable for the refugee population. The process of accessing these services may be too complicated, the location inaccessible, or it may require some amount of reciprocity. Additionally, participants reported that the pace of mainstream microenterprise services is often too fast for refugees or begins at too high a level, not taking into account the potential differences in business culture. Basic financial literacy classes were listed as a need in preparing refugees for entrepreneurial endeavors.

The lack of awareness about mainstream resources presents considerable challenges to forming working partnerships and collaborative efforts with other providers around refugee microenterprise and addressing some of the access and cultural dilemmas.

Risk tolerance. At the individual level, refugees do not have difficulty taking risks said two participants (4%). Many have literally risked their lives to seek safety in the United States. However, at the agency and community levels, risk tolerance may be a challenge to supporting innovations around entrepreneurship. Participants reported a hesitation to take risks in developing new programs or a lack of vision in creating innovative approaches to self-sufficiency. As mentioned above, funding limitations can be huge obstacles. However, the entrepreneurial spirit found in individuals and the drive to work around enormous barriers should be cultivated in organizations and institutions.

DISCUSSION

Given today's economy and the unique challenges and skill sets of newly arriving refugee populations, entrepreneurship can appear a politically and socially attractive solution. This endeavor is facilitated by providers' attempts to develop culturally competent services and the idea of supporting the legendary American dream. However, in reality, only a small number of Americans engage in entrepreneurship endeavors. While owning a small business may be a realistic and positive goal for a refugee family, it may not be an appropriate path for all refugee families. The decision to widely implement microenterprise programs with refugees should be pursued with a thorough, thoughtful assessment, and extensive preparation.

Amazingly, many refugees have demonstrated entrepreneur success without the support of technical assistance organizations and refugee service providers. However, other refugees may need support in order to build a solid foundation. Regardless of readiness, a history of work experience in the United States is a critical building block toward the long-range goal of starting a small business. Thus, stable employment is a common denominator in the successful path to self-sufficiency among refugees.

Community agencies provide an initial orientation to employment and begin ESL and literacy training. While employment orientation and ESL training are standard services provided by refugee service providers,

literacy training has emerged as a current need. Efforts to access or partner with existing community literacy programs should continue.

Caseworkers identify skills, interest, language, literacy, and family commitments of newcomers in order to better prepare for employment success. Employment is located and complemented by on-the-job training. This may entail an arrangement with the employer in which work hours are gradually increased as ESL, job coaching, and orientation hours are slowly decreased. ESL and/or literacy services should continue, regardless. Financial literacy trainings may be provided at convenient locations and hours after refugees have secured steady employment. Financial literacy curricula may be incorporated into ESL and literacy classes. By separating initial job placement from job upgrades, refugees can work toward financial self-sufficiency first and then build broader self-sufficiency as they identify and pursue other professional and family goals.

Based on initial and subsequent assessments of refugees' skills and interests, caseworkers may link clients with GED classes, post-secondary education, vocational training, or microenterprise support. Depending on need, part-time or full-time employment and ESL may be ongoing. When possible, this is supported by refugee resettlement agencies through tuition assistance or reimbursement and/or information and referral. One technical assistance provider participant of this project shared that it may be helpful to investigate multiple career paths and outline specific and detailed steps necessary in preparing for and advancing in this career.

Following training, a job upgrade is secured or small business is launched. ESL and part-time or full-time employment may be ongoing. For small business owners, this may involve participation in a business "incubator," which offers additional technical and financial support during the development of a business.

It is clear that refugee service providers struggle to improve and expand programs given limited capacity and erratic and waning levels of funding. Collaboration is a key factor of success in innovation and capacity-building. Creative, innovative projects can be most successful with the leverage achieved through a collaborative effort. Partners may include funders, employers, non-refugee specific agencies, private entities, and/or resettlement agencies. The power in numbers and in diversity of expertise is valuable. Effective models of productive collaborative efforts demonstrate that open and ongoing communication at all levels of service delivery is critical. Agency leadership buy-in and involvement sends a clear message to all staff of their leaders' expectations of

cooperation and interaction with staff from the other agencies. A third-party or neutral facilitator may be useful in initiating partnerships, but open communication must ultimately occur among all partners.

Going beyond other area refugee providers and linking up with mainstream social and financial services is of crucial benefit in the current funding climate. However, simple referrals to mainstream services are not always adequate. Rather, partnership is important in order to preserve the linguistic and cultural capacity and support necessary for success. Another relatively untapped strategy to improve capacity involves establishing a regular stream of knowledgeable, long-term volunteers, such as Vista volunteers and graduate student interns.

The entrepreneurial spirit demonstrated by refugee business owners can also inform refugee service providers in establishing income-generating activities to supplement existing funding. Income-generating activities may also be structured such that they will dovetail with the needs of refugee clients. For example, given the growing needs for home health care and personal attendants among the aging population, an agency may establish a senior recreation or daycare center. In addition to providing services to the elderly and generating income for the agency, this model will create multiple job training opportunities for refugees, such as food preparation, janitorial work, healthcare delivery, office management, and business administration.

The risk of burnout is common to those providing direct services to the refugees, as is a sense of overwhelming need. In addition to high caseloads, the over demand on services may impede innovation or the energy and resources for implementation of those innovative ideas. A variety of professional development opportunities and self-care support should be made available to caseworkers and other staff who serve refugee clients. In addition, agencies can both build capacity and complement existing staff by hiring staff with diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and expertise.

In addition to the family-centered approach that refugee families themselves use in addressing their challenges, strength-based and client-centered approaches are valuable tools in working with the refugees. Data revealing that refugee families approach home ownership, car purchases, and other major financial decisions as a family responsibility was a finding supported by the Phase I project. This may not be dissimilar to the way non-refugee families operate. Therefore, programs for resettlement, orientation, job placement, and small business development services may be best structured to utilize this family-centered approach rather than have an individual focus. Providers must begin to see the family, in addition to the individual, as the principal agent of change.

Existing orientations and training modules are often not accessible to or culturally appropriate for the refugee population. Training opportunities also tend to begin at a more advanced level than what is needed by newly arriving refugee populations. Through partnerships with micro-lenders and other economic development non-profit organizations, refugee providers can adapt existing tools as part of their orientation and training programs. Examples of possible and needed topics include:

- Financial literacy—How to make ends meet on a limited budget
- Banking—How to open accounts at a bank
- Credit—Understanding the use and dangers of credit
- Avoiding scams and telemarketing pitfalls
- Writing a business plan
- Homeownership
- Buying a car and car insurance
- Computer literacy
- Introduction to health professions

Broad financial literacy classes should be geared towards all incoming refugees, including youth. Young refugees are often the first to learn English and become assimilated to American culture. Consequently, many youth have an understanding of their family finances and paying bills. Thus, it is critical that adolescents also develop solid financial literacy in order to assist their families and to prepare for adulthood and their own financial independence.

Untapped resources for collaborative partnership regarding financial literacy training and small business development are found in the community and statewide microenterprise organizations and community development corporations. These organizations provide loans to micro-entrepreneurs who do not qualify for conventional commercial loans in addition to technical assistance regarding small business development. Training programs, similar to those provided by microenterprise and Individual Development Account (IDA) programs, should be utilized in refugee resettlement orientation and training. Non-profit organizations that offer financial and technical assistance to small business owners may be interested in providing business development training to refugee clients. In exchange, refugee service providers may be asked to provide extra assistance to refugees who subsequently enroll in small business development programs. This extra assistance may involve language interpretation, system navigation, and other support. Given that many of these microenterprise organizations do not have language capacity beyond Spanish, refugee providers may also utilize volunteer and/or staff

interpreters. This type of partnership may benefit potential entrepreneurs in addition to groups, such as emerging mutual assistance associations. Budding entrepreneurs may benefit from the services provided by microlenders, but mutual assistance associations (which are non-profit organizations) may also benefit from some of the technical assistance offered by these same microlending organizations. Adapting existing orientations and locally available training modules to the refugee population is an efficient strategy and avoids “reinventing the wheel.”

Responses from refugee providers indicate that refugee clients may indeed be starting their own businesses, but mostly they are doing so without assistance from providers. In addition to microenterprise, it is important to explore to what extent refugees are taking initiative for getting job upgrades, and why they are not dependent on resettlement agencies for assistance. It would be helpful to conduct a program evaluation in order to better understand why some clients disappear from services and the extent to which they have become integrated enough to navigate employment upgrades and entrepreneurial activities on their own. Program evaluation would also explore how clients are obtaining job upgrades and starting their own businesses independent of agency assistance. Agencies will be able to learn from their strategies and integrate them into services with clients who have had less success.

More information is needed about service providers' follow-up practices, capacities, and needs. Providing follow-up services is somewhat of a luxury, given the scope of services currently funded and provided. It would be useful for funders to begin requiring these services and make funds available to implement them. With additional resources, providers can get a better sense of their service delivery system from the clients' perspectives and better track outcomes in order to improve practice based on those outcomes. As is the case with other human services fields, additional resources and staff development are often necessary in developing better outcome-based practice.

Refugees are engaging in microentrepreneurship; however, data from this research suggest that these clients are not necessarily using provider assistance or other microenterprise resources. Rather, in a true “survivor” style, some refugees, often with the assistance of their family members, are developing their own paths and efficacy. Yet, the extent to which they are successful or overcome significant barriers or succumb to challenges and experience failure is unknown. Both refugee service providers and the microenterprise providers appear to be under-prepared to fully assist refugee entrepreneurs. Microenterprise programs may not have adequate linguistic and cultural competence to serve refugee populations,

and refugee service providers are generally unaware of appropriate micro-enterprise referral sources in their community. While refugee-focused IDA programs are available in a few communities, mainstream IDA programs are more common. Awareness among refugee service providers of locally available IDA program eligibility will increase appropriate referrals to the community. One suggestion for making this happen is for a refugee service provider staff member to be designated as liaison to community microenterprise and microlending organizations. However, this suggestion is not intended to overload the staff member, and it is expected that the agency will need to make the appropriate workload provisions for this new responsibility.

In conclusion, while some refugees are immediately employable, others need considerable support in gaining employment and moving toward self-sufficiency. Some refugees have entrepreneurial dreams and aptitude, while others benefit from more traditional employment and upgrade services. Thus, the path to self-sufficiency should represent a deliberate and iterative process of assessment and application of that learning on the part of refugees and those providing services to refugees. In addition, innovations and flexibility in funding mandates are needed in order to better serve the increasingly complex needs of incoming refugee communities.

LIMITATIONS

This study utilized a non-probability convenience sample, and, therefore, the findings are not generalizable to other refugee groups. In addition, the persecution experienced by refugees often results in caution and mistrust of governmental entities and others understood to be in positions of authority. Many potential refugee and immigrant participants expressed concern about sharing their history as an entrepreneur or declined to be interviewed because of their concerns about how the information would be used. Nevertheless, this information is important for future research with this population.

REFERENCES

Busch, N., R. Fong, Cook Heffron, L., & McClendon, A. (2004). *Assessing the needs of refugee and asylee families: final report*. Austin, TX: Center for Social Work Research. The University of Texas at Austin.

Center for Demographic & Socioeconomic Research & Education. (2002) *The Texas challenge in the twenty-first century: Implications of population change for the future of Texas*. Retrieved August 30, 2005, from <http://http://txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/TxChall2002.pdf>

Certo, S. T. & Certo, S. C. (2005). Spotlight on entrepreneurship. *Business Horizons*, 48 271-274.

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objective and constructivist methods. In N.K.Denzin & Y.S.Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook on qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dent, D.J. (2004). Coming to America. *Inc.*, 26 (11), 100-108.

Edgcomb, E.L. & Klein, J.A. (2005). *Opening opportunities, building ownership: Fulfilling the promise of microenterprise in the United States*. USA: The Aspen Institute.

Else, J., Krotz, D. & Budzilowicz, L. (2003). *Refugee microenterprise development achievements and lessons learned, Second Edition*. ISED Solutions.

Final Notification of Allocations to States of FY 2004 Funds for Refugee Social Services, 69 Fed. Reg. 35384 (2004)

Germain, C. (1991). *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*. New York: Columbia University.

Gold, S. (1992). The employment potential of refugee entrepreneurship: Soviet Jews and Vietnamese in California. *Review of Policy Research* 11(2), 176-186.

Kupferberg, F. (2003). The Established and the newcomers: What makes immigrant and women entrepreneurs so special? *International Review of Sociology*, 13 (1), 89-105.

Marger, M.N. (2001). The use of social and human capital among Canadian business immigrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27 (3), 439-454.

Masurel, E., Nijkamp, P. & Vindigni, G. (2004). Breeding places for ethnic entrepreneurs: A comparative marketing approach. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 16 (1), 77-87.

Petrakis, P.E. (2005). Risk perception, risk propensity and entrepreneurial behavior: The Greek case. *The Journal of the American Academy of Business, Cambridge*, 7 (1), 233-242.

Potocky-Tripodi, M. (2004). The role of social capital in immigrant and refugee economic adaptation. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 31 (1), 59-91.

Raijman, R. & Tienda, M. (2003). Ethnic foundations of economic transactions: Mexican and Korean immigrant entrepreneurs in Chicago. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 26 (5), 783-802.

Saleeby, D. (2006). *The strengths perspective of social work practice*. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Sanders, C.K. (2004). Employment options for low-income women: Microenterprise versus the labor market. *Social Work Research*, 28 (2), 83-92.

Schreiner, M. (1999). Self-employment, microenterprise, and the poorest Americans. *Social Service Review*, 73 (4), 496-521.

Schreiner, M. & Woller, G. (2003). Microenterprise development programs in the United States and in the developing world. *World Development*, 31 (9), 1567-1580.

Servon, L.J. & Bates, T. (1998). Microenterprise as an exit route from poverty: Recommendations for programs and policy makers. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 20 (4), 419-441.

Ssewamala, F.M. & Sherraden, M. (2004). Integrating saving into microenterprise programs for the poor: Do institutions matter? *Social Service Review*, 78 (3), 404-429.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

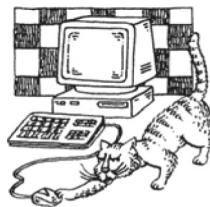
Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Toussaint-Comeau, M. (2005). Self-employed immigrants: An analysis of recent data. *Chicago Fed Letter*, April 2005, Number 213, 1-4.

Woolcock, M. (2001). Microenterprise and social capital: a framework for theory, research and policy. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 30, 193-198.

doi:10.1300/J051v16n01_05

**Get Articles *FAST* with
the Haworth Document
Delivery Service and Rightslink®**



To request single articles from Haworth, visit www.HaworthPress.com/journals/dds.asp. You can order single articles here directly from Haworth or through Rightslink®. We have over 40,000 articles ready for immediate delivery, and you can find articles by title, by author name, by keyword, and more!

R I G H T S L I N K
Copyright Clearance Center