

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES TO WATCH

Catholic Charities of Tennessee

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Urbanicity: Urban/Rural	Percentage of All Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 100%
Location: Nashville, Tennessee	Demographics: Refugees, primarily East African, as well as Middle Eastern, South Asian, and some Central American, African American: 44%, Asian: 56%
Grades: K-12	Hours of 21st CCLC Program Operation: Monday through Thursday, 2-6 p.m.
21st CCLC Enrollment: 130	

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships Opportunity Conditions Addressed
Process Conditions: Linked to Learning Relational Interactive
Organizational Conditions: Integrated

Help Families Dream Again and Heal from Trauma

Catholic Charities of Tennessee’s (CCT) 21st CCLC provides trauma services for refugee families. Housed within a refugee resettlement organization, the CCT 21st CCLC works with a vulnerable population. Families in the program were forced from their home countries due to violence or oppression and fled to a second country where they faced deprivation and instability in refugee camps. Eventually, they resettled in Tennessee.

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Wraparound Services

CCT provides wraparound, holistic services to families to help them acclimate to their new lives, access services to gain independence, and understand and become involved in their children's education.

When families arrive, CCT provides one month of intensive programming that includes helping parents meet with doctors, conducting assessments, and visiting and helping parents enroll their children in school. CCT staff provides case management to address barriers for families. Housing issues are central, whether ensuring a home is safe, accessing subsidized housing, or reviewing a lease. "Sometimes it's just helping them figure how to ride the bus," says Jennifer Escue, Refugee Youth and Elders Services Coordinator. Teaching families how to access social services such as emergency food or supporting a mother in getting a restraining order both fall within CCT's umbrella of work. In addition, CCT provides workshops in English, financial literacy, and child safety.

Families Understanding U.S. Schools

Staff members make sure parents have the correct information about schools and their children's education. They provide orientation to the school system and work with the Office of English Language Learners to teach parents techniques to help their children succeed in school, even when the parents are not fluent English speakers.

CTT provides case management to assist with basic needs. A School Liaison and Parental Involvement Specialist helps connect parents with their children's schools.

Staff Training

Many children have not attended school previously, so ensuring that staff and teachers understand the families' cultures and respect parent empowerment are critical. This includes basics such as listening to parents and asking the right questions to supporting parental engagement and goals.

"We hire diverse staff, staff that reflect the communities we serve, as well as native born staff, CCT's Refugee Youth and Elders Services Coordinator." says Escue.

Staff work collaboratively to train teachers and school personnel on working effectively with refugee families. This includes training on the impacts of trauma on child development and learning.

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Family Goals

Escue notes the program's overarching focus, "Our goals are to help families to determine their own goals and to help them reach them, whatever they are.

"We've learned to approach family engagement and involvement with humility. It seems obvious, but asking families what they want and truly acting on it is important. They know what they need," says Escue.

"I remind people that our clients don't need us to fix anything," Escue says. Rather, the focus is on helping parents with practical matters, such as understanding report cards, ensuring that all children are enrolled in school, and learning about the college application process.

TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES

- Hire staff who reflect the diversity, languages, and cultures of the families in your program.
- Help families recognize their own strengths and resilience.
- Show families they are valued.
- Encourage families to honor their own assets and the value they bring to their new communities.
 - o Recognize families' holidays and rituals.
 - o Attend families' cultural celebrations.
 - o Create opportunities to honor families' craft-making and storytelling.
 - o Remind families that the United States is a country of immigrants and benefits from their contributions, just as they benefit from being in the country.

Lessons Learned

- Some hidden norms and rules built into mainstream culture can be difficult for some families to decode, whether they are immigrant families, refugee families, or families living in poverty.
 - o Equip staff with the tools needed to teach families how to navigate systems.
 - o Let parents make decisions for their families.

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