

International Reach Within Our Community

*by Dr. Cheryl Wolf, Chelsey Jenkins
Counseling and Student Affairs*

The Talley Family Counseling Center (TFCC) is an on-campus clinic and training center for counseling students pursuing their master's degrees through the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs. The master's level interns see clients from the campus and community free of charge in the clinic located in Gary A. Ransdell Hall; they also provide outreach to local schools and community organizations.

Over the past year, the International Center of Kentucky in Bowling Green was just one of the community organizations where the TFCC interns provided service. Supervised by TFCC Co-Director Dr. Cheryl Wolf, interns Chelsey Jenkins and Spenser Sawyers provided psychoeducational groups to incoming refugees from countries including Burma, Nepal, and Somalia. They led discussions about U.S. versus native cultural norms and processed discussions around a variety of issues incoming refugees face including the local acceptance or rejection of their spirituality/religion, challenges with their job search, language barriers, integrating into U.S. schools, and adjusting to their new lives in the U.S. . For example, many of the refugees experience serious issues in their efforts to secure a job in order to provide for their families because they don't speak the language well enough to take the drivers exam and without the ability to drive, they struggle to get to a job each morning outside of a bus line. Many of the discussions centered on current resources that are available to the refugees in order to help them in their job search, as well as possible ways in which to improve these efforts.

In addition to the groups concerning adjustment to U.S. cultural norms,



the interns also provided psychoeducational groups concerning the issue of domestic violence. Topics that were covered include descriptions of abuse (i.e., child abuse, child neglect, and domestic violence), how to address abuse, general information needed to report abuse, warning signs of abuse, and alternatives to violence. Given the Kentucky statute which requires all persons to report suspected abuse of children, spouses and vulnerable adults, we believed it was important to educate the refugees concerning this issue. In addition, we hoped these psychoeducational groups would encourage any victims and/or perpetrators of abuse to understand the seriousness of this issue and to subsequently seek the help they need.

During our experiences at the International Center, we learned about the significance of understanding cultural differences in our work with clients. As future counselors, we want to provide the most appropriate and culturally-sensitive services as

possible. The International Center provides a rich environment for those seeking to improve their multicultural awareness. Although we learned a great deal through our preparation for and presentation of these salient issues, we learned the most through our interactions with refugees, translators, and staff members. Most of all, we admire the courage, determination, and resiliency displayed through the refugees' relentless pursuit for a better life for themselves, their families, and future generations.

Furthermore, as an increasing number of international refugees are being resettled in the Bowling Green area, the staff at the International Center \work hard to provide a variety of resettlement services to these incoming refugees. The staff jobs require long hours in stressful situations since their case management of individuals includes many refugees who arrive from violent, impoverished, and war-torn countries. Therefore, in addition to working with the refugees, training and support was provided to the staff.



Training topics included deescalating crisis, basic counseling skills, avoiding compassion fatigue and burnout, and addressing domestic violence.

This work began as part of an interprofessional teaching/research/service grant project with faculty and graduate students from the counseling (Dr. Cheryl Wolf, Chelsey Jenkins, and Spenser Sawyers), social work (Dr. Saundra Starks and Taylor Haynes), and psychiatric nursing (Dr. Dawn Wright and Tanya Bush) programs. When the Project Empower grant funding ended in December 2014, additional funding was sought to continue the interprofessional collaboration. An ALIVE Center grant was awarded for research beginning this summer focusing on the caregiver strain to assess the stress and needs of the caseworkers and paraprofessionals serving incoming refugees. In addition to better serving the staff and refugees in the community, graduate students in counseling, social work, and psychiatric nursing will gain experience in facilitating focus groups, transcribing and coding data, and participating in the development and delivery of interventions identified

through the study. In the long term, we think this will lead to higher job satisfaction and a healthier work-life balance for the staff members and ultimately better services for our refugee population in Bowling Green.

This interprofessional collaboration embraces the vision of WKU to be a leading American university with international reach. With the influx of refugees to Bowling Green, we realized that international reach can begin within our own communities through supporting our community partners and training graduate students to be sensitive to the needs of culturally diverse populations. Additionally, this partnership supports WKU's mission statement to prepare students of all backgrounds to be productive, engaged, and socially responsible citizen-leaders of a global society.

If you would like to learn more about the Talley Family Counseling Center, please visit www.wku.edu/talleycounseling. To learn more about the International Center of Kentucky, visit www.icofky.org. The International Center hosts lunch and

a variety of short films addressing the issues of refugees on designated Fridays starting at 11:45am. Additionally, they are hosting the free 2015 World Refugee Day Festival on Saturday, June 20 from 11am – 4pm in Roland Bland Park.

See www.icofky.org/news_events

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