

## Arizona Refugee Head Start Project

[Music]

Fosiya Mohamed, Mother: I'm hoping my kids...they finish school, go to university, college...

Kortney: Good morning Asli! Good morning, Fosiya! How are you?

Fosiya: I'm fine, thank you.

Kortney Mosher: It must be an amazing feeling as a parent to be able to drop your child off at a school or center knowing that they're safe while they go to work and not have to worry. And to know that their child or children are being taken care of by individuals who are educated, who know how to interact with children.

Amy Moore: Children are getting that leg up on education; they're getting the English skills; they're getting...so that they will succeed further in school, which also benefits the whole family, because the parents are seeing the children learning and then the parents can also become involved in that education.

Mindy Zapata: I think what I would like to see refugee families know about Head Start in their community is that we share a commonality and goal with refugee families that we are interested in the well-being of their children and making sure that their children are going to be successful in this American education system, and that Head Start can play a very important role in helping them navigate this new system.

Narrator: This video explores how the Head Start program can address the needs of refugee families, while highlighting the critical importance and advantages of collaboration, between refugee resettlement entities and Head Start providers. Refugees come to the United States with unique challenges and assets. They may have suffered violence and torture in their home country or during their flight as refugees. Many have endured long stays in refugee camps with limited access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities or other resources. The effects of war and physical trauma as well as the secondary trauma of witnessing violence against loved ones contribute to higher rates of adjustment issues as well as a decreased sense of security and well-being.

Charles Shipman: This isn't just about culture shock. Refugees are also dealing with the effects of trauma, because these are people who have survived war and persecution. We need community providers to understand who refugees are. We need community providers to understand what it is that they're dealing with because there are a lot of issues with which refugees are coping.

Kortney: I think it's all about understanding and just trying to learn more about the path that has brought them to where they are now.

Narrator: In early 2012, the Arizona Refugee Resettlement program worked with Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services to initiate a pilot project engaging parents, resettlement agencies, mutual assistance associations, and Head Start grantees in developing a collaborative model to increase refugee enrollment and parental involvement in Head Start in Arizona.

Charles: We're very happy about the enthusiasm with which Head Start has reached out to us and we feel like this is a really valuable partnership.

Mindy: Through this collaboration process, the Head Start program has been able to learn about the importance of the self-sufficiency plan for refugee families and refugee service organizations have been able to be informed about the family partnership agreement process that the Head Start program goes through. And through this collaboration and mutual understanding and training, we've been able to identify ways that these two very similar plans can complement one another, and increase the potential and expedite the completion of the self-sufficiency plan for refugee families.

Narrator: Appropriate care and early education are critical to a child's well-being and development. We all play a role in ensuring that children receive the care and services they need to help them succeed. The federal government established Head Start in 1965, with the goal of giving low income children a head start in school. Head Start promotes growth, learning and school readiness by providing early and comprehensive services including education, nutrition, health and mental health services. Early Head Start was established in 1995 to serve pregnant women and children up to three years old.

Fosiya: They're really good teachers. They like my kids. They play with my kids. They feed my kids.

Narrator: Newly arrived refugee families are often reluctant to access important services due to such barriers as limited English proficiency and lack of familiarity with U.S. systems and policies. Refugee

service providers are charged with helping families navigate resources that can best serve their needs, including mainstream services such as Head Start.

Mindy: One of our Head Start initiatives is to have a strong foundation of parent and family engagement with all families, and, to partner with refugee service organizations that can help strengthen the cultural and linguistic relevance within the program throughout all the systems that are occurring and services that are being delivered by the Head Start program; the partnerships with refugee service organizations are really essential.

Charles: Working with organizations like Head Start, we have the opportunity to share with them about some of the cultural backgrounds of refugees, their belief systems, some of their behaviors and practices, particularly, around parenting and childcare.

Narrator: Linking newly resettled refugees with local Head Start programs can provide many benefits for refugee families. Some of the advantages include access to early childhood development services, allowing parents to go to work more quickly after arrival in the U.S., and comprehensive assessments and services for the whole family.

Fosiya: Enrolling in Head Start for my kids, it changed my life, because I am able to go to work, for five or six hours a day; here are my kids. I don't have to ask nobody to watch my kids. And I really like it.

Mindy: One lesson that we learned was that by, through this collaboration with refugee service organizations that when we were able to identify refugee individuals from the community that could actually become linguistic and culturally relevant staff in our program, that the increase in refugee families in seeking out our Head Start program for enrollment opportunities increased significantly.

Charles: We're really excited about the collaboration that we've had with Head Start. With a very short time frame, in a matter of months, we've worked with Head Start to enroll, I believe, 98 families, which is a significant network of support for refugee families that they wouldn't necessarily find in the refugee resettlement-specific service.

Fosiya: I can tell other refugee moms or dads, or anybody who have kids; it's a good program; it helped me a lot. And I know it can help them. It help me when I go work; it help my kids -- they learn more; it helped me see respect here, when I come here. They tell me what my kids eat; they tell me whatever

my kids they do. It's a really good program. And I'm telling everybody from my country and all the other world refugees; it's a really good program. For learning the kids. Everything.

[Music]

[Credits]