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“Home Is the Mouth of a Shark”: Trauma and the Needs of Students from Refugee Backgrounds from the Perspective of Boundary Spanning Refugee Resettlement Workers

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Abstract: This research project examines the experiences of four individuals working in refugee resettlement and their perspectives on the educational needs of refugee students, given their role as boundary spanners. They also discuss the need for teachers to encourage students to use the Funds of Knowledge in the classroom. Participants discuss their varied experience as professionals in refugee resettlement, with two being refugees and one being an immigrant. This paper (1) explores the stress associated with relocation, (2) delves into the mental health issues faced by individuals from refugee backgrounds, emphasizing trauma, (3) analyzes how inefficiencies and lack of support within the public school system contribute to a stressful and ineffective experience for all parties involved, and (4) highlights the importance of human connection. The implications for future research are also discussed with particular attention paid to the need to actively work with other stakeholders.

Keywords: trauma; refugee; teacher impact; boundary spanning; Funds of Knowledge; education

1. Introduction

The title of this paper utilizes the first line from the poem “Home” by Warsan Shire [1]. Shire writes, “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark” [1]. Later in the poem, she elaborates, “i want to go home/but home is the mouth of a shark/home is the barrel of the gun/and no one would leave home/unless home chased you to the shore” [1]. We chose to use this poem to inform the title of our paper because this paper is about those who also felt that they were chased to the shore by the circumstances they faced in their home country.

This paper is based on a pilot project that was conducted to better understand how refugee resettlement workers view the issue of trauma as an impact factor on students from refugee backgrounds. While we could have conducted research with teachers, administrators, parents, or students, and we will do so as part of a wider project, we initially chose refugee resettlement workers because of the role they play as “boundary spanners” [2,3]. Boundary spanners are those who are known for permeating boundaries, in this case, not physical boundaries but the boundary between school and home [4,5]. Essentially, they

act as a bridge between refugee families and the school system. They have a unique lens with which to view the circumstances of students and families from refugee backgrounds. The experiences and opinions of four individuals who work in or are otherwise affiliated with the refugee resettlement process are highlighted. Two of the research participants are refugees, one is an immigrant, and one is a White American woman born in the U.S. Each of them presents a unique perspective on the experiences of refugee families, but more specifically, the educational needs of refugee students.

This paper begins by exploring the stress associated with relocation and the school enrollment process, with a focus on how these challenges exacerbate existing stressors in the lives of refugees. Following this, it delves into the mental health issues faced by some individuals from refugee backgrounds, emphasizing trauma. This paper also analyzes how inefficiencies and lack of support within the public school system contribute to a stressful and ineffective experience for all parties involved, including teachers. Lastly, the value of human connection and the utilization of the Funds of Knowledge (FoK) framework to facilitate that connection are discussed as a means of addressing the needs of students who have been impacted by trauma.

We want to acknowledge that we recognize that the refugee experience itself is inherently traumatic, but also point out that refugees are resilient and may have different levels of trauma—with some having little to no trauma at all. This paper focuses on those students who do suffer from trauma and how best to ensure their success. Our goal is that this research will provide insight into the experiences of refugees in order to better understand challenges as a means of ensuring student success because as Shire so eloquently illustrates, “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark” [1].

2. Literature Review

The U.S. public education system attempts to offer quality education to all students and provides interventions for those in need of support; however, students who have experienced trauma may not receive the most appropriate interventions, or any at all if they appear to be “well-adjusted”. According to The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [6]:

Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (p. 11).

While traumatic experiences can have broad and lasting effects on students’ personal lives and academic performance, most teachers receive limited training on interventions for trauma-informed approaches ([7–10]. Research shows that teachers are particularly unprepared to deliver trauma-informed interventions to students from refugee backgrounds, which is a growing challenge as more than half of the world’s 26.4 million refugees are children under 18 and many will be resettled in the U.S. [11,12]. Some even go so far as to say that a “traditional teacher”, in terms of training, is unqualified to work with refugee children [13]. Nearly all students who come to the U.S. as refugees have potentially experienced trauma due to whatever factors led them to garner refugee status [14]. Our understanding of how trauma impacts children is incomplete, as is our level of preparedness for how best to serve them in our public-school classrooms [15].

Students from refugee communities are vulnerable to the harmful effects and outcomes associated with childhood trauma as the traumatic events they may have experienced in their home country are often exacerbated by the myriad of challenges that frequently await them upon arrival in the U.S. Factors such as learning a new language, learning loss after an extended educational interruption, and coping with the effects of the broader hardships their caregivers face, such as unemployment and an inability to find affordable housing, all contribute to challenges to both their personal and academic lives [16]. It is necessary to understand that the lived experience of refugees is different than those who voluntarily immigrate to a new country to understand the unique needs of students from refugee

backgrounds. Refugees are “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” [17]. A refugee is *forced* to move away from harm, while an immigrant *chooses* a new place to reside, although extenuating circumstances can be *and usually are* involved when one chooses to immigrate, complicating what refugee status indicates. As a result of experiencing what are often traumatic life-altering events, refugees report higher rates of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental-health-related issues than other immigrant populations [18]. Despite this, there are limited resources available to those from a refugee background. Therefore, the host society is often willing to point out the underlying mental health issues that refugees may potentially suffer from, while simultaneously failing to provide resources to address those concerns.

Our understanding of how trauma impacts children is incomplete, as is our level of preparedness for how best to serve them in the public school system [15]. Students that have experienced trauma often struggle in the school environment, and many other aspects of their lives exacerbate the situation. “A large number of studies have documented a wide range of symptoms experienced by some refugee children, including anxiety, recurring nightmares, insomnia, secondary enuresis, introversion, anxiety and depressive symptoms, relationship problems, behavioral problems, academic difficulties, anorexia, and somatic problems” [19]. Additionally, if they are from a minoritized group, they will likely be impacted by the stereotypes associated with the group and will be impacted by the subsequent consequences that come with that group association. Students who are marginalized in any form often find themselves being held responsible for the academic challenges that they face [20]. Many risk being misdiagnosed with learning disabilities or deemed aggressive because the trauma they may have experienced is not recognized. For example, PTSD is rarely identified in schools as a potential cause for some student behaviors such as those related to aggression or violence, though in reality, it could be the root cause [21,22]. Furthermore, Nguyen and Hamid [23] point out that stringent language policies and expectations in many schools result in students being labeled unable to learn and have a negative impact on their linguistic and ethnic identity. Such forms of subtractive schooling [24] which forcefully remove the language and cultural traditions of students is often the experience of students who come to the U.S. as refugees.

It is important to note that trauma does not impact children solely from refugee backgrounds. Some studies have estimated that 68% of children in the U.S. have experienced one or more traumatic events and that factors such as unreported sexual abuse likely mean that the number is higher [25]. This understudied topic must be approached more vigorously and should be a topic of concern for all school officials as it applies to so many students’ lives. Refugee students who suffer from trauma are the focus of this study because of the additional layers of challenges they frequently face as newcomers.

Trauma-informed approaches can be utilized in schools, just as in other organizations. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identifies six fundamental principles of a trauma-informed approach [6].

1. The first principle is related to safety and the assurance of an overall safe environment.
2. The second principle focuses on developing relationships built on trust.
3. The third principle focuses on peer support from trauma survivors to trauma survivors.
4. The fourth principle is related to collaboration and mutuality. Power should be shared and there should be communication and collaboration among stakeholders.
5. The fifth principle highlights empowerment, voice, and choice—or the recognition of survivors’ resiliency and right to make their own decisions.
6. The sixth principle is related to acknowledging cultural, historical, and gender issues with attention to serving the needs of all groups and individuals equally.

Though rational and seemingly self-explanatory, these principles take training to implement. Some believe that training should go beyond professional development and should be part of teacher training programs [26]. Szente et al. [9] highlight specific strategies that can be used to assist students who have experienced trauma; these include the need

for explicitly teaching emotions and how to express them and assisting with activities that build social skills. Again, such strategies must be taught to teachers so they can bring them into the classroom.

In the school setting, building relationships and overcoming language barriers with caregivers can be challenging [27]. There can also be a disconnect between school officials and families, fears of discriminatory attitudes from school officials toward members of certain groups, and a lack of knowledge about the school system on the part of families [26]. One way to mitigate these concerns is to build relationships with students' families and have teachers study and implement the Funds of Knowledge [28] framework.

FoK refers to the historical and cultural bodies of knowledge within a family [29]. It is based on the assumption that all people have knowledge that is important and useful for the survival of the individual and group [28]. FoK allows for the opportunity to recognize the value within the families that teachers work with and reevaluate the belief that children need to be "saved" from their families and community [29]. Rather, the framework allows teachers to learn about the culture and lives of their students [29]. This is often done through home visits and the collection of ethnographic data [28]. However, there are multiple approaches to the FoK framework. Subero et al. [30] advocate for the use of "identity artifacts" or those items that can be incorporated into the curriculum by the teacher to present connections between the lives of students and the classroom. Through this, students see recognition of their culture [31]. Studies have shown that students benefit greatly from a positive relationship with educational role models, such as teachers [32]. The FoK framework has been noted to improve the academic performance of students, assist with breaking down barriers between school officials and the families of students, and improve curriculum by contextualizing it to the lives of students [33]. The framework contributes to building trust and collaboration—two aspects of the SAMHSA [6] principles. For a trauma-informed approach to work in classrooms, it should be paired with the FoK framework to establish two-way communication and community building between stakeholders.

While there is a good deal of research about students from refugee backgrounds and the contributions or limitations of the education system, there is less research that focuses on refugee resettlement workers and their opinions, ideas, or observations about students from refugee backgrounds in the education system. Yet, in most cases, these are the same individuals who have the responsibility of assisting with finding services for students facing difficulties in school, struggling with their mental health, and feeling isolated from peers. This work intends to assist in filling that particular research gap.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Team Positionality

Our team of researchers comprises individuals who are all refugees, first-generation immigrants, or second-generation through one parent. It was important to us to build a team of those with some sort of similarity to the individuals we would be learning from and whose circumstances we would be conducting research on. The team members have combined experience in education, refugee resettlement, non-profit work, and mental health work or counseling. All team members are affiliated with the MENA region or Africa. The team members have ethnic roots in Türkiye, Lebanon, Kurdistan, and Sudan. In terms of religion, all researchers aside from one identify as Sunni Muslim. Of the members of the team, three are men and eight are women. There are two assistant professors on the project, five graduate students, and one student who was an undergraduate student at the time of research, though he has since graduated. Given the background and expertise of the researchers, this work is extremely meaningful to each of them, and they feel a connection or bond to those who have immigrated to the U.S., particularly those coming as a refugees.

3.2. Data and the Phenomenological Approach

All participants in this project were included through purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Two participants were acquainted with the PI, and the other two participants were found through connections that members of the research team had. All participants were interviewed in a location of their choice and at a day and time of their choice. Some participants chose to be interviewed via Zoom, and their interviews were recorded.

This research employed a phenomenological methodology, which utilizes qualitative data to examine the lived experiences of individuals [34]. By adopting this approach, a researcher aims to uncover robust and nuanced findings that emerge organically from the data. Data is then examined through a cyclical process that continuously connects the parts and the whole in relation to one another [35]. This is meant to provide a depth of knowledge but from a smaller sample size than other methods [36].

The data for this research were analyzed using Intellectus Qualitative, which uses AI-driven auto-coding technology [37]. Coding was performed through multiple iterations, with note taking occurring in conjunction with the coding in order to present the opportunity for in-depth reflection. Codes were then placed into clusters, and meaning was synthesized.

Codes were produced using the AI assistance provided by the Intellectus Qualitative program [37]. However, all interviews and the AI-generated codes were reviewed by the PI. Many of the codes were changed by the PI to ensure accuracy and alignment with understood interviewee intentions. Codes were then clustered and interpreted by the research team.

3.3. Participants

This project presents findings from research conducted with four participants. Each of the participants worked in refugee resettlement at the time of the interviews. Table 1 presents additional information about each participant.

Table 1. Participant Information.

Pseudonym	Length of Time Working in Resettlement	Country of Origin
Jean	Not stated	Democratic Republic of Congo
Ava	5 years	U.S.
Burak	3 years as a board member of a refugee organization	Türkiye
Khan	Not stated	Afghanistan

3.3.1. Jean

Jean came to the U.S. from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Believing that he had a unique understanding of the refugee experience, given his own experiences, he established a refugee resettlement organization that is led and staffed primarily by those from refugee backgrounds.

After having been a chemical engineering student in DRC, he came to the U.S. and tried to complete his education. However, completion of his initial degree was a challenge as a result of the language barrier that he faced, the need to work full-time, and the responsibility of caring for his family. Yet, he did finish his schooling, receiving a B.S. in business, an MBA in finance, and an M.S. in taxation. One of the most important goals of his work is to see more children from refugee families be successful in school and see more adults from refugee backgrounds continue their education and find fulfilling careers.

3.3.2. Ava

Ava began her journey into refugee resettlement as a middle school teacher. She worked in that role for five years and was conducting Christian mission work on the side in Central America. She then began to work in a shelter for unaccompanied youth as the

head of education. She worked in that capacity for three and a half years. She elaborated on this role by questioning the definition of “refugee”.

I know technically, legally, they are not refugees, but I mean, depending on how you’re defining refugee. . . I was working with children who were crossing the border unaccompanied and they were being held in our shelter until they could be released to a vetted sponsor in the U.S.

While working in the shelter, she ran mentor programs, and she was also in charge of the Refugee School Impact Grant. “The Refugee School Impact (RSI) program provides grants to state and state-alternative programs to support school districts impacted by school-aged refugees and ORR [Office of Refugee Resettlement]-eligible populations” [38]. In that role, she describes herself as “the go-between between school officials, the families, the students, and our agency”.

3.3.3. Burak

Burak is a professor at a large research university. He is a first-generation immigrant who is originally from Türkiye. As a result of the political affiliations he had in the past, he is unable to travel to Türkiye without fear of incarceration. Therefore, although he does not have official refugee status, he must reside outside of Türkiye. He serves as a board member for a refugee resettlement organization.

He describes his work with the organization as “very personal” and closely related to his interest in social inequalities. Furthermore, he believes that as a “non-White, Muslim person who lives and works in an area that is primarily White and non-Muslim”, it is important to be involved in the wider community.

3.3.4. Khan

Khan came to the U.S. as a refugee from Afghanistan. When he first arrived, he was of high school age and had a limited proficiency in English. Despite these initial challenges, he successfully completed high school and subsequently enrolled at a prestigious state university. He has been involved in refugee resettlement since 2018. Initially, he worked as a caseworker, and he was then promoted to the position of senior caseworker. During the crisis in Afghanistan in 2021, Khan was again promoted and became a supervisor.

Khan became involved in refugee resettlement because he believed that there was a need for those from refugee backgrounds to be involved in it. He recognizes that the need is great and that there should be more support for refugees. He wants to be a force for positive change.

3.4. Institutional Review Board

The Institutional Review Board at Arizona State University approved the research proposal before research began. Once interview data were collected, the data was kept confidential. Only members of the research team had access to the data. The data are stored on a Google Drive managed by the PI’s institution. Otter.ai was used for recording and transcription, and Intellectus Qualitative was used for data analysis. All interview data in this paper are presented with the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of research participants and the individuals that they discuss in their interviews.

3.5. Setting

The participants in this research each live and work in one of two states in the western portion of the U.S. The states where research participants live and work are all listed in the top 20 states of refugee arrivals per capita [39]. This made their experiences extremely valuable because they were in a setting that allowed them to interact, assist, and become familiar with various individuals from refugee backgrounds.

4. Findings

The interviews primarily focused on the educational experiences of students and their families from the perspective of those who work in refugee resettlement. However, there were also questions related to mental health overall, the resettlement process, and how those in the refugee resettlement field manage their role's responsibilities. The interviews had four themes running through each. In each interview, the commonalities were an emphasis on (1) the resettlement process and stressors associated with it, (2) mental health challenges as a result of the challenges of integration and the consequences of trauma, (3) difficulties related to the education system which are often associated with communication, bullying, a lack of empathy, a need for training, and trauma, and (4) the importance of human connection. Each of these findings and how they relate to the educational needs of refugee students will be discussed.

4.1. Relocation Stress: "Don't Get into Trouble in a White Dominant Society Means Keep Your Mouth Shut"

Being a refugee comes with stressors that are difficult for anyone who has not experienced them to imagine. Beyond the stress of leaving behind a life that took years to build and often under the worst of circumstances, attaining refugee status is just one of many hurdles that must be surmounted. Ava said the following:

I think the people who gave me more insight to that were my co-workers who had come over through the refugee resettlement process and talked about how stressful it is to have to make sure your story is right and you tell it the same exact way like five times because of how many times they interview you. You never get sick because then you have to redo your medical stuff. You can't get pregnant. It just is such a rigid system that to even move through the resettlement process from the country where you fled to a third country is very, very stressful.

Beyond this, there can be misunderstandings with those from your own country and society. This can be particularly true if they are also awaiting relocation. Ava went on:

I had one co-worker who told me he and his family got resettled pretty quickly, which was uncommon in that area and everyone turned against their family and thought they were like witches and had used their powers to unfairly move through the process and so it's not easy. I think the waiting is also really hard because some people wait 10 to 15 years in a camp and never get to enter into that process.

While the example Ava provides is an extreme one, it is natural for individuals who are in competition for resources to try to secure resources for themselves and their loved ones. Additional stressors occur once resettlement is underway. In the U.S. at least, newly resettled refugees have limited housing options because the refugee resettlement agency makes the decisions for them. Ava described housing, school choice, and jobs.

Well, they got zero choice in housing. I know that for sure because we work in pre arrivals. So we'll get notification someone's coming. We find an apartment, we put furniture in the apartment. They don't get any decision for any of that. Once they have a little bit more understanding and can leave and break leases. They kind of do that on their own. I don't think they had much choice in schooling because they would just enroll them in the closest neighborhood school and those tend to be the same schools because they follow the apartment complexes. So, we have these pockets where schools have huge refugee populations, because the four apartment complexes in the area are the ones that we can place people in. So there's really not a whole lot of choice. Jobs are pretty similar.

Given that schools are largely funded based on zip code and property value, higher-income areas generate more funding for schools, and those funds are then used for facilities and resources [40]. Apartment complexes with high numbers of resettled refugees are

unlikely to be in the highest-income communities, and so schools that may already be struggling financially are then provided with high numbers of students who need a great deal of support.

The process of relocation can be daunting and impactful on all of those involved but can be particularly so for children. Khan highlighted that this is particularly true when it comes to trying to adjust to the culture of the U.S. and also when trying to build friendships. He used the experience of Afghan refugees as an example.

Once the Taliban took back control of Afghanistan in 2021, the U.S. had a large number of Afghan refugees arrive. There was a lack of preparedness on the part of the U.S. government, and so a lot of responsibility, which is not normally left to them, fell on resettlement agencies. This resulted in a situation where families were moved multiple times within Afghanistan and then again within the U.S. He relayed the following: “imagine, we served over 900 clients from Afghanistan and how are we going to quickly put them in a housing? They don’t have any documentation and the state was not ready to provide any benefits. . . So we had to place them in hotels. . .” After being placed into the hotels, the agency had to then reach out to local school districts to get all children enrolled in school. Yet, the kids knew that this was all temporary and questioned whether or not they should get attached. ““Am I going to have a friend here now? I’m going to leave from this place”, the older ones [thought]. The younger kids will go there and then have fun, but again, even the younger ones will have the fears of what’s going to happen”, he explained.

Khan went on to discuss that the changing dynamics of education nationally and locally impact students from refugee backgrounds immensely. Given the fact that education changes from zip code to zip code in the U.S., the expectation, performance, and morale of a student can be greatly impacted depending on which school a student attends and how often they relocate.

In schools that might have less rigor, a student may have a better chance to perform at a high academic level. “If that student is doing high performance then he will be the high performers among the low performers. He’ll be the high performers, they’re the top one”. However, if that student is then moved to a school that is more rigorous, the student may struggle academically and then experience a significant blow to their morale.

Beyond this, there is pressure among families to see their children do well and integrate into the local community—but without losing all prior cultural and religious affiliation. Burak felt there is pressure among the refugee community where he lives and the wider immigrant community to conform.

They are giving the kids an opinion like [don’t] take [the U.S.] for granted. You know? Don’t criticize or don’t, don’t get into trouble. You know what I mean? [The] don’t get into trouble mentality makes people quiet. . . Don’t get into trouble in a White dominant society means keep your mouth shut. . . survive, smile. Be a good citizen, not a bad citizen, or a good Muslim not bad Muslim.

This often then results in young people deciding to abandon many of their traditions, and that can lead to conflict within families. Even when there may be local support among those from shared backgrounds, many young people find themselves in an identity crisis.

We have a mosque in [city of residence] and there are lots of refugees, Afghani refugees, Somalian refugees, you know, they’re Muslims and they’re coming to the mosque and there’s a mentorship program. It’s like to basically prepare teenagers or kids to integrate them more to the society, basically to collaborate [affiliate organization] with the mosque more. You know what I mean? Because my observation in the mosques are like, no structure at all, I mean—no structure at all. Other than Quran teaching or whatever, they don’t have nothing to prepare those kids for [public school] education. I don’t know, integrating them, even integrating their beliefs to the society as well. Most of them are really, they are living like a double life. They are hiding being Muslim or [their] names and so forth.

All of this can lead to mental health challenges and significant amounts of stress for young people and their families. Mentorship is extremely useful, particularly when it comes from peers who have had similar experiences [41]. However, it cannot prevent the mental stress of the already prevalent difficulties children are experiencing in the school system.

4.2. Mental Health: *“There Are Ways That People Keep Themselves Healthy, Mentally, outside of Our Western Model”*

Research participants astutely pointed out that many of the methods used in the “West” for dealing with mental health stress or mental health related issues are dealt with differently among those from various other parts of the world. For many, the community is the first place they may go to in order to find solace or assistance. Ava gave the example of Christian refugees and their relationship with churches.

It’s less that they saw mental health care through a church and more that belonging to a community where they could count on people and something that reminded them of home and was part of their cultural identity...and it’s very uncommon to find a refugee who’s not religious. I can’t even think of a family who was not in some way connected [to a faith]. When we say mental health care from a Western lens, we envision someone going to a counselor. We envision the one on one talking about your feelings, that kind of stuff and there’s nothing wrong with that, but there was no framework for that. So if you were coming from a different country, under these crisis conditions, and even when the country wasn’t experiencing that turmoil, if there was ever a point like Syria was pretty stable beforehand, it wasn’t something that people did and you pursued mental health by being part of a community, by practicing your faith, by, you know, having the freedom to participate in these meaningful life activities. And here, for one, they’re pulled completely away from their country of origin to they’re usually separated from their community at large and or their family members. They don’t have as much freedom here in terms of mobility because they have to use the bus system and there’s just a lot of ways that being removed from that space takes away, they’re the things that normally help us be healthy, you know, because not everyone has to process trauma through talk therapy, like that’s not the only way to get mental health support...there are ways that people keep themselves healthy, mentally outside of our western model and there’s definitely a disconnect between this is how you deal with your feelings and trauma, and I think that’s why maybe we don’t see a whole lot of people moving in that direction.

Ava highlights the importance and value of different ways of achieving health. For many, health is related to their community and relationships with other people. Furthermore, she discussed the fact that finding a therapist who understands the culture and the languages of those seeking out support is quite difficult to find.

There aren’t enough services available especially for people who are trained on how to work with people from other cultures because there’s a lot of really strong beliefs about mental health from these different communities and so even their desire to embrace mental health services is really—it’s not very common, because they attribute it a lot to spiritual attacks and things like that. So, to find a provider who is aware of those understandings—and they have to work through a translator, which is really hard because there are very few people working as clinicians who speak the languages of the people who come over here.

All of these challenges compounded with the tendency to seek community-based forms of mental health care or relief prevent many individuals from receiving formalized mental health treatment.

Although Khan has a different role than Ava and works in a different city, he saw similar trends among his Muslim clients. For those from older generations, there can be

barriers to seeking mental health professionals outside of their community. According to Khan, they think, “I don’t really have to go talk to a therapist or to a mental health [professional]. . . It’s okay. I can pray, I can read Quran. I’ll be fine”. He counters this argument, saying, “yes, yes, you could do that—good. But they also need to talk to someone professional. The fear is—that professional can be changing my religion or am I gonna love my husband maybe, or am I gonna love my wife [after receiving therapy services]?”

The fear of being led away from the religion of Islam or from one’s spouse may arise from the perception that many non-Muslims in the “West” view Islam as oppressive and may assume that Muslim women have no rights in marriage, despite a lack of knowledge about Islamic marital traditions and the rights of involved parties (for more information on this topic, see [42]). Further concerns may arise regarding therapist endorsement of concepts such as lipstick feminism [43], which could be at odds with Islamic traditions and cultural mores as a means of grappling with mental health concerns. There may also be a perception that, while in many Muslim societies, there is a primary goal of maintaining the health of the family unit, in the “West”, personal happiness appears to be elevated above that of the collective. For some, this view clashes with the values they were brought up with and what they want to emphasize to future generations. Khan further stated that when individuals or couples try to go to a therapist, if they feel that their culture or religion is degraded, they begin to view therapy as a whole as *haram* or forbidden, and then there is little effort to try a different therapist.

Consequently, he highlighted the need for imams trained in counseling and therapy to work with Muslim refugee families. However, he also brought up the fact that there are not enough imams who are qualified to do both the job of a therapist and the work of an imam, who in the U.S., often serves a much broader role as a community leader than in the Muslim world [44,45].

We tend to see a trend where imams [who] their focus or where their education was on psychology where they were therapists or family counselors or marriage counselors. Those people, [if you reach out to them with issues] will help and say, “yes, okay, of course, 100%”. You can reach out to them, but majority of them are out of state, they are not here.

This points to a larger need for imams to be trained in counseling, particularly given the fact that they are often placed into that role, despite the fact that most of them have no training in psychology or counseling [46]. Literature on the topic is in full agreement with his perspective [46–48]. Alternatively, there should at least be therapists who are familiar with the community that families and individuals can be referred to for services [49].

Khan went on to say that in his experience, younger individuals are more likely to seek out help if they feel that they need counseling or other forms of treatment. However, Ava brought up a significant issue related to therapy for those of a younger age, and that is a lack of trust if they also lack a common language with the therapist.

If we’re just talking like anxiety, depression, things like that, I haven’t seen most kids talk about that, let alone like pursue support services. There’s always a big concern regarding the communication within communities. . . So a lot of my Syrian students would be like, “Miss I’m only dating Mexicans because if I even look sideways at another Syrian like the whole community knows by the time I get home from school”, and so there was a reluctance often to share through a translator because the translators were often part of the same community and they didn’t trust that. More often than not, the ways that I saw students find outlets for that were through involvement in churches. So a lot of, especially the Congolese community, the kids were very involved in their churches and music and stuff like that. There were a couple of groups at the local mosques that kids would go on trips with and some sports teams.

Therefore, while from the experience of Khan, there might be younger individuals who are comfortable with seeking out mental health professionals outside of their network, this

may also largely depend on their ability to communicate without the use of a translator. The default option always tends to be related to community resources, even if the community organizations and members are not prepared to serve that purpose.

4.3. Educational Challenges: “A Caseworker Has to Go There and Empower the Parents. You’re a Refugee or Asylum Seeker, but It’s Your Right. It’s Your Right for Your Kids to Go to School.”

4.3.1. Communication

The challenges that refugee students and families face in the education system are robust, but one primary issue is the lack of communication between families and school teachers. Depending on the level of language and cultural background, some families may seem disconnected from the education of their children even if conversations at home focus on education and academic achievement [22]. Ava mentioned language barriers and some profound differences in the cultures that many families come from regarding their relationship with educators.

There are a lot of parents who are not literate in their own languages and so they develop different ways of keeping an eye on what their children are doing, but there’s definitely a disconnect in terms of being able to advocate for what their students need. They just kind of trust that if they’re going to school, the kids are getting what they need. The relationship with teachers too, culturally, is very different, because in the home countries, a lot of them would say, the teacher went to the mosque with us so I would always just check in and see how my kids [were] doing or she would be at the market or things like that. Here there’s like no overlap between their lives and the teachers lives outside of school and so a lot of them have shared that they don’t—they feel like they don’t have the ability to ask questions, but more often than not, it was just this trust for educators that my kids are in your hands. This is your job. I trust everything is going fine unless you find me and tell me otherwise.

This seeming lack of concern can reflect poorly on families, but the explanations given by Ava make sense and speak to the larger issue of language barriers and a lack of community relationships that many families are accustomed to having with teachers [50].

In order to address the language barriers, some school systems have hired translators, but this is very dependent on funding. Ava commented on a district in her city and their attempt at providing translation services.

[Unnamed local district] was pretty bad. I think they had like one part-time Swahili translator for half of the year and then couldn’t afford it anymore. They just didn’t have those resources and they didn’t even use a lot of funds for language translators to have these conversations with parents. So some school districts have more resources than others just because of how much money they have.

As a result of the lack of funding, this district was unable to accommodate the needs of the families within this district, and this is despite the fact that the district had a high number of students from refugee backgrounds. The lack of communication can lead to bigger issues with families, particularly related to bullying and other social concerns.

Some schools have large refugee populations, and this works to the benefit of the school staff because they are able to learn about the community that the students come from. However, unless significant efforts are made to integrate students into the school community, it can lead the students to isolate themselves and prevent integration or language development. Ava witnessed this firsthand.

It can go both ways in schools because it can be helpful because if a school receives enough of a certain community, they start to like realize oh, there are some things we can understand about this particular group. But then also, some of the students become. . . I don’t know, like, they have their own cultural community and so they don’t integrate very well because they have the option to just stay in their

little bubble and don't even get me started on ELD classes. They're so isolating and so they're in this group with all the people who speak their language and don't really get to become part of the school community, unless the teachers like actively drawing them in.

She went on to express the need for classes that are more equipped to meet the needs of refugee students, particularly regarding language. In particular, students need classes that are focused on literacy and meeting them where they are in terms of their academic needs.

Some of the outstanding challenges I see—a huge one is literacy. . . English language development programs are not designed to teach literacy. They're designed to teach English to people who are already literate and so, there's a good deal of children who are not literate in their native language and don't have opportunities to recuperate basic math knowledge and literacy in a meaningful way because they get stuck in like an 11th grade classroom. And they just have to figure out how to function so I think that is a disconnect between where were they when they left their home country versus where are they in our school system and they're often just placed by age. That can be really hard. I think the responsibilities that they have also complicate things because they're often working or they're translating for their parents or they're providing child care while they're doing these other things that make it difficult for them to focus on school. They don't have an academic support in the home so their parents can't read their homework don't often understand what they need to do.

Furthermore, Ava discusses the challenges that teachers also face when they are trying to work with students who have limited English. She compared her experiences to those of classroom teachers who received no orientation or support regarding the background of their students and what might be culturally appropriate.

A lot of my co-workers were people from the countries that a lot of the refugees were from. So they were like—they'd point out when I was doing something really White American, [and] be like, that's not gonna work. You can't talk to people that way. This won't make sense to them. But if you're a classroom teacher, you don't have access to translators. For the most part, you just get the kid in your classroom and have to figure out how to communicate with them. If they're within their first like couple of years of being here and then you're so disconnected from that culture—I don't know many teachers who have had the time to pursue understanding about the cultural values of many of these different kids backgrounds or even get to know their families well enough to understand how they help their students and what they bring to the table and it's hard. It's hard because the kid is your connection there but communication is limited, and your time is limited.

Ava is speaking to a well-known problem in the education system, a lack of resources, including time, provided to teachers.

4.3.2. Bullying

If a student and their family are unable to speak to the school officials, it becomes easy for students to be the target of bullying [51,52]. Jean actually went to a school meeting about a situation related to the bullying of a refugee student. The parents could not speak English, and so he went to translate.

I've dealt with some schools where I think they were, you know, discriminating [against] those children. . . We had a refugee kid who was being bullied and attacked by other kids, but the counselor was siding with the other people. The victim was refugee kid. Because of a lack of communication—the parents spoke no English and the kids did not know how to speak good English. So there was a big issue there. So when we went to talk to try to speak to the school, there was

an issue of misunderstanding with the counselor. We even left, shut the door and just left. . . in the counselors mind, they will regard you as someone inferior to other parents.

While there is no way to prove that the counselor viewed them as inferior to other parents, the perception among Jean and the parents that they were viewed as such is problematic. Realistically, the inability to advocate for this child meant that the child continued to be placed in a vulnerable position, as is the case for many refugee families who do not speak the same language as the teacher [53].

4.3.3. Lack of Empathy

Some teachers, for a variety of reasons, appear to lack empathy toward their students who are from refugee backgrounds. This is, at least partially, likely due to the significant burden placed on teachers in the public school system. Rather than the student being seen as a valued member of the classroom, they may be viewed as a hindrance to the learning of other students or an additional challenge to sort out.

Ava discussed the situation that some of her students came out of, and these experiences no doubt impacted the ability of the students to learn, develop, and adjust to life in the U.S.

When I worked with unaccompanied youth, part of their intake was they would see a clinician and they had to kind of go through their story and we would get images, like snapshots of what they experience in refugee resettlement. We didn't receive any of that because they're not required to disclose anything. So it was just from what students shared and I've had students share that they had experienced rape or sexual assault, murders—like watching people in their community being murdered, having their entire city destroyed, the trauma from flight and not knowing, you know, having to hide and lie about who you are. There was a lot of post-migration trauma too, like, students who had experienced assaults here in the US.

While these experiences certainly traumatized students, there is also a lack of empathy that the participants recognized on the part of school officials. Most of the time, they do not know the background of the students, and the lack of knowledge certainly contributes to a lack of empathy because they simply do not know the backstory of children and their families. However, there can even be a lack of empathy toward students with educational challenges. Ava told the story of one child that she worked with during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would work with a refugee family and I would also work with their classroom teacher and some of the teachers are able to really see their students and they understand that it's difficult. The situation they're in, like, they are and they're trying to function in like a society in a culture in a language that is foreign to them and they identify that difficulty, but they don't see the student as like broken or behind or languishing. But a lot of other teachers would just see what the student was not doing and not able to do and there was a young girl named [name withheld for anonymity]. She was in first grade when she got here and I don't think she had gone to kindergarten in her country of origin and it was during COVID. So she was doing all of her learning online and none of the kids in that family, had used a computer before. So I was over at the house trying to teach them how to login and how to manage these things and the teacher was just, like incredulous that she wouldn't sit down and like listen to the lesson. I'm like, okay, she doesn't understand anything. You're seeing she's never looked at a computer before. There's probably a lot of other factors going on. Her three brothers are on computers, like two feet away from her. Cut the kid a break, figure out how to build on what she does know instead of like nitpicking at what you see she's not doing right.

This story is indicative of a lack of empathy on the part of the teacher. However, it also speaks to the level of stress that the teacher was also likely experiencing as she tried to teach online during the pandemic, particularly when teaching students who are struggling [54–56]. Yet, what the child may have taken away from that experience is that her teacher does not have patience for her and is not willing to work with her in a compassionate or even patient manner.

4.3.4. Need for Training

All the participants mentioned the need for increased training for school staff. They felt it imperative for student learning and adjustment. Unfortunately, none of them felt that there were enough training opportunities. Ava discussed the merits of Student Services coaches but also the fact that there are not a lot of opportunities for individuals to be placed in that role.

So, one of the school districts down here actually has a refugee Student Services Department and they have, not many, but they have a few student success specialists who have hours at schools where there are like heavier concentrations of populations and I think that's like a helpful start for sure. But there's not enough people to really provide support for those families and I think, overall, I haven't seen much training have been done with educators who are outside of that.

She highlights the need for training in order to provide necessary support for families and students. However, there is an overall lack of it.

Jean brought up the need for an overhaul of teacher training programs in order to prepare pre-service teachers better so that they are ready for refugee students and more prepared to meet their needs.

The school [officials] will also need to be taught, go to certain orientations on refugees and immigrants. How to deal with them, you know, how to deal those kids who are coming from different countries who does not speak the language, who has a different culture, how to understand the mental behavior, their mind, to understand the way this kid function, their way of communication. . .I think it's best not to only focus, because the U.S. it's an international hub. People come here from all over the world so why can't we incorporate this new technique to our educators? How can we make it better in the way that instructors or teachers from elementary school, high school can better communicate and understand mental health for this particular population?

The type of training that he discusses is beneficial not just for students from refugee backgrounds but for all students. All students need support, and all teachers need proper training in what types of supports are needed and how to provide them.

Yet, the need for training and support is not just related to teachers. The needs of families are similar. For example, the inability of refugee families to understand aspects of the school system can then impact other parts of life. Jean said that family members will often resist attending certain events or appointments because they are stressed about the needs of their children in relation to school. Consequently, he tries to help them find support.

He said that they will say, "Well, I have this stress because my kids bring me homework and I'm not sure if they're doing the homework right or not. . ."

So now that caseworkers will be like, "okay, bring this to the supervisor".

[The] supervisors like, "okay, let's go connect with the development teams. Let's see if there are any volunteers that are going to volunteer for them, like coming to do the tutoring with the kids, the parents maybe. . .This is America, we really need to [take] care of the family as well and their education or their future. It's also important."

The need to focus on the entire family unit is part of the necessity to approach education holistically.

Additionally, Jean brings up an important aspect of the need for orientation and training for families, the legal ramifications of not knowing certain laws, rules, and policies, especially those regarding children.

We do a lot of advocacy for our population. The challenge there is that, you know, the parent, if they can be equipped with enough tools, with ways for them to do good parenting with the children, proper parenting will help the children and the parent to navigate and to connect—to better collaborate with the children. They can only receive those proper parenting skills by going through some additional classes through [an] agency like ours and outside agencies. . . One thing can be legal in a refugee camp, or country, but it's maybe illegal here in America. . . Spanking [for example], when you try to correct your children.

Jean brings up important points in relation to the need for training and how training for families can contribute to an improved environment for children. This would impact home life positively, as well as school performance.

Regarding school, additional training could certainly help teachers to better support their students. If they are more aware of what to expect, then they can better prepare for the needs of the students.

4.3.5. Trauma

Trauma has an impact on school performance and outcomes [57,58]. Despite this, teachers are rarely trained in how to deal with students who have experienced trauma [59] and that lack of training is then exacerbated by a lack of contextual knowledge about students from refugee backgrounds, though it should be noted that refugees are not a monolith, and there are varying degrees of trauma, as well as a wide breadth of experiences among refugees.

Jean explained his view about how trauma can be reduced if those involved in the life of a person have an understanding of their background.

Trauma, some of it can be resolved by having a proper and a better understanding of the person's background. The person where they're coming from, what is the culture in the Arab society, in a French society, in the African society? The people that come here, how can we help with coping? Maybe helping them with different skills, you know, like relapsing prevention, some have issues with fighting, drugs, alcohol—because they grew up and were raised in the wrong environment.

In agreement with his observation, Ava, though quick to mention that she wanted to avoid generalizations, did say that the way that some individuals process trauma can deepen underlying issues already prevalent in children.

A lot of the parents have experienced severe trauma and they don't talk about it and they just kind of shut down or they become disconnected in cases. . . I think when parents don't process their trauma, and they're under so much pressure with the self-sufficiency and [thoughts of] 'I gave everything to get my kids here and I want them to be successful', like they have very little space to reflect on their own needs. And I think for children that can be really hard because that's your model for how to deal with difficulty. So what I see is, unless something changes, that's going to be the learned method for dealing with pain, and that impacts generations.

Yet, what is modeled for children socially also makes a lasting impact. She noticed a good deal of this from boys who came from Syria. She pointed out that many of the boys from African countries were born in refugee camps; however, many Syrian children

witnessed a lot of violence firsthand as they were not born in camps but lived amid the violence of war.

One trend I definitely noticed with Syrian boys specifically, because a lot of the Syrian students came from, like [they] directly leave from conflict. . .they were very explosive and had a short trigger and they would get into a lot of fights and honor was a big part of how they protected themselves. So, their honor had to be defended, and often that was through like, fighting people who dishonored you or disrespected you or shutting down and not wanting to engage with that teacher anymore.

Again, Jean and Ava are both speaking to the need for greater understanding related to the background, culture, and circumstances of families and students. There is also obviously the underlying need for therapy or similar forms of support but that, too, goes back to the cultural and background knowledge of those being served.

Jean discussed the need for trauma therapy but pointed out the necessity of cultural knowledge. "Maybe it's [the solution] trauma therapy, right, but that can be customized. You know, the therapist must be able to navigate between culture". This observation is closely related to the reasons mentioned earlier as to why more refugees do not seek formal therapy or counseling services. There is a lack of understanding related to the culture of those in need of support.

Burak added additional insight about trauma and counseling in the school environment.

When asked if he felt that having a counselor specializing in trauma at each school site could help relieve long-term mental health impacts of trauma on kids who are coming from refugee backgrounds, Burak, like Ava and Jean, discussed the importance of cultural awareness. He said the following:

Yeah, I don't think so. The reason I say I don't think so is because to me, it might be bias, it is very hard for counselor or therapist, especially in the school, especially White therapists, to understand their difficulties, their vulnerabilities. I don't think so actually. Yeah, it's like, it's weird that you know, living in the United States, living in a privilege place, being White or like being this, being that—to me, it is hard to understand even their culture.

He went on to explain that knowing the culture is important to prevent further complications within the family setting.

If you tell that person "oh, you need a safe space. Just talk with your mommy and daddy" and that person is coming from, I don't know, Middle East. What kind of safe space are you looking for in the Middle East?

I'm generalizing but [the child says] "hey, daddy, this is my body, my choice!"

[Father replies] "screw you!"

You know what I mean?

[Father says] "What kind of my body? My choice?"

So that person needs to understand the culture. Yeah. And if you tell the teenager [certain things], you may cause different problems.

Burak brings up important questions about the role of professionals in the lives of refugees and the need for culturally specific training. This is very similar to the discussions around why more Muslim individuals, but Christians also to a certain extent, do not seek out assistance from counselors or therapists.

Burak went on to point out that it is also not the responsibility of students and their families to necessarily teach school staff or anyone else about their culture, religion, or the situation that brought them to the U.S. Burak said, "From the Critical Race Theory perspective, I am, as a minority, I am not responsible to teach you how to ask me a question or how to know me. You need to put some efforts to research on, but those things are most

of the time on us". Therefore, he sees the need for teachers to perform their own research about their students. In conjunction with this, we would add that if the intention is there on the part of the teachers, they should not have the responsibility to perform all of the research and learning single-handedly, but it should be an effort that is supported by those at the district and state levels.

If we examine all of the above insights, each of them brings us back to the need for human connection and the power of community. This is not true just for refugees but for all human beings. Yet, many refugees already hail from cultures that emphasize human connection, and the emergency situations from which they come frequently exacerbated and emphasized that need.

4.4. Human Connection: "This Is How Humans Do Life..."

Being a refugee can be an extremely isolating experience and can impact individuals and families in a variety of ways. Many families and individuals who come to the U.S. as refugees see being part of a community as indicative of a meaningful and fulfilling life. Ava discussed a realization that she had about isolation prior to her work in the field of refugee resettlement.

I went to a library once in town, and I saw some kids sitting outside and I started talking to them, because they looked like they were a little confused and that was the first time I had ever like, encountered, or heard of a refugee because they told me like they're from this country, they're here for this reason and it just struck me that I could live in a town that I had been there through all of my undergrad and probably four years after, and never interacted with a refugee because I lived in a part of town where they weren't, um, localized. . .you could live here your whole life and never have a clue because of how isolated the populations are.

At one point during the interview, Ava was asked about the FoK framework, her views on what it is, and the extent to which she felt that its implementation would be beneficial for educators who work with students who come from a refugee background. Later in the interview, she brought up that portion of the discussion, saying the following:

I'm thinking about the times you've mentioned Funds of Knowledge and in my head, it's like, before we even get to Funds of Knowledge, we just have to like figure out how to function at the base level. But then it really does make me think like, I've brought up relationships a lot, and I don't think I had realized how significant that is—like the way the relationships between refugee communities and the schools that they're a part of, and their case managers and just seeing people as full people instead of these piecemeal, like I have this responsibility, so that's what I'm worried about. . .Like, we need to take care of our teachers and the people who are doing this work like we need to be there's so much to learn, like teaching in itself is an art even if you taught a homogeneous population, and it's a skill that can be crafted and when you're working with students who are in very unique circumstances and you're plunging them into a system that wasn't designed for them. That disconnect causes a lot of problems and then when you bring trauma into it, and they're relational, like without the ability to communicate verbally—we're lost. We don't know how to connect and even when we can communicate verbally, our cultural differences inform how we interpret what's going on. So, it just feels like there's a lot of disconnect between these different groups and maybe a sort of unwillingness on the schooling side to think more flexibly.

While it is difficult to measure the flexibility of school officials and policies, one primary take-away can be garnered from her perception, and that is the importance of human connection. She further discussed the ways that teachers could connect with students and the potential ramifications when they do not.

I think for students to be successful, they need that kind of, like integration of services and if there's one thing I've learned from working in refugee resettlement, its personal connection and community and trust building is the way to work with people. Don't send emails, don't send letters home, don't zoom them, don't call them in for parent-teacher conferences. Go eat a meal in their house, go sit down with the family because they don't respect any other type of interaction. Like this is how this is how humans do life. . . In the only way that I've seen anything, like change or grow, is from spending one on one lifetime with families because then they feel heard and they feel seen and they feel like they've got someone they can talk to and they feel like someone cares about their child and that they're there.

Her comments speak to the need for connection with families to the school and, more importantly, to the teachers who are engaging their children in learning. The emergence of micro-schools, community-initiated education centers, and collaborative learning models are just some of the examples of the acknowledgment of the need for community and connection in learning spaces—even for those who are not refugees. A pedagogy of human connection is necessary for effective learning, and that is a fact, no matter where the student is from [60].

5. Discussion

The insights provided by the participants in this study point to (1) stress of the resettlement process, (2) mental health challenges and their prevalence in the classroom, (3) difficulties navigating the education system, which are associated with communication, bullying, a lack of empathy, a need for teacher and family training, and trauma, and (4) the importance of human connection. Some resettlement agencies, such as the one run by Jean, are working on providing the mental health support that they recognize is needed for many of those coming as refugees. Jean discussed this endeavor.

We are looking into getting our facility licensed to provide mental health for refugee and immigrant. So that's something we are working on right now is just to focus on education and mental health. . . we are trying to find ways to focus on that [and] maybe hire a licensed, someone from the refugee background, who is a mental health professional, who will understand the cultures.

However, aside from refugee resettlement organizations, schools need to empower their teachers with the ability to attain knowledge and collaborate with organizations and institutions that can assist them in the learning process. Teachers are often expected to have endless capacity for care when it comes to their students, and they do, but this does not mean that they do not experience fatigue and the frustration of a lack of resources, training, and support—all of which are needed to meet the educational needs of their students, particularly those of refugee students [61].

While teachers have their limits in terms of time, capacity, and resources, the FoK framework can be extremely helpful in allowing teachers and students to connect. Through the framework, which encourages educators to incorporate the identity of their students into the curriculum and classroom, teachers build “strategic connections” with families [52]. The curriculum is tailored to the students and reflective of them, their family, their community, and their former home [11]. This can facilitate mutual learning among students and therefore lessen social discrimination and increase a sense of belonging [62]. While this does not eliminate the ramifications of trauma or discomfort related to relocation, it does reduce the impact and assist with the facilitation of “wrap-around services”.

According to Ava, this is all possible, and she knows of a public school that is doing much of that already.

I cyberstalk the school so much because I think it's incredible. . . They do such a fantastic job of providing, first of all, wraparound services. So they have social workers, they have counselors or clinicians, the teachers are like required to go to

families homes and spend time in the families homes. They have like a whole different way of doing school. They focus on intensive developing [of] those baseline skills in reading and math and they're constantly reassessing students and reforming the groups in order to help them move towards readiness or whatever the next step is.

What she describes is a school that is implementing the FoK framework broadly throughout the entirety of the school, whether they refer to it as such or not. Furthermore, her description also highlights the ways in which the school has created “wraparound services”, or holistic care and a culture of community [63]. Based on the findings of this research, there needs to be increased knowledge on the part of all stakeholders, families and students included; communication; and community building and collaboration. Once each of these components is in place, other issues of concern such as bullying or the need for increased empathy will follow. This will also result in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [6] six fundamental principles of a trauma-informed approach being applied almost by default as it assumes that students will be safe, have trust in their relationships, have peer support, engage in collaboration, and exercise their right to voice, and all of this will be done within a framework that applies equality to students, regardless of differences related to aspects of their identity.

6. Implications for Future Research

For a trauma-informed approach to work in classrooms, it should be paired with the Funds of Knowledge framework to establish two-way communication and community building between stakeholders. There needs to be increased training for teachers, and this will lead to greater connection to families and the ability for the FoK framework to be implemented, which will assist both teachers and students. Yet, teachers should not be expected to carry this burden on their own and there should be greater resources allocated and attention paid to assisting students who have experienced trauma, particularly if they come from a refugee background. However, it should be noted that many students who are not refugees have also experienced various forms of trauma, and increased training will only positively impact those students as well.

One of the obvious drawbacks of conducting pilot research such as this is that we did not get the opportunity to speak with teachers, paraprofessionals, students, or former students. While some involved in the research were also parents, they too were interviewed not as parents but as those working in refugee resettlement. The next step in this research is to speak with other stakeholders. However, we encourage further research on these and related issues in order to increase the available literature and knowledge about ways to improve how students are being served and how teachers are being empowered to provide the educational services that they have dedicated themselves to.

7. Conclusions

Schools are community spaces, and therefore, a sense of community and belonging must be established for the best outcomes. If trauma-informed approaches in the classroom are combined with greater knowledge about the lives and histories of students and their families, specifically through the FoK framework, students will be more well-adjusted when it comes to the U.S. education system and also to U.S. culture. Furthermore, teachers' experiences, perceptions, and effectiveness at working with students after training require examination in order to ascertain how best to approach professional learning and implement programs. If home is the mouth of a shark, then the place of resettlement should not solely be for surviving but for thriving.

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