



PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Elevating Refugee Perspectives about Access to Disability Services in Arizona

The goal of this project was to understand the experiences of refugees with disabilities in Arizona. Researchers explored ways that the disability service system may not be accessible to refugees. They also identified ways to make the service system more accessible.

Researchers at the University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities reviewed accessibility policy (laws) for disability and refugee service agencies in Arizona and the U.S. Researchers asked refugees, resettlement workers, and disability service providers in Arizona about their experiences. Researchers used a method called Group Concept Mapping to sort data and find what they consider most important. Finally, researchers also did in-depth interviews with refugees with disabilities and their supporters to learn about their lived experiences.

Here are some of the problems mentioned by people who shared their ideas

- Refugees and their families may not be aware of individual rights and opportunities. For example, the opportunity to stay in school beyond age 18 if you have goals to be achieved.
- Inability to get the support needed to pursue education/employment.
- Lack of language interpretation for people with disabilities and their supporters. Interpreters were not provided or were provided in incorrect language or dialect.
- Families missing out on services because of service system issues. Examples include:
 - The person with a disability not being included in meetings with providers.
 - Families disagreeing with the goals that education staff have set for their child with a disability.
 - The long length of time to get services.
- Disability service system may not recognize the importance of the community/collective. Clients may consider the well-being of their families or communities more important than the individual needs.
- For children under 18, there was confusion about whether parents could be paid as caregivers. It may be important to the family to provide care instead of a Direct Support Professional because the family knows the person best.

Some recommendations for fixing these issues include

- Ensuring language access, including enough funding and oversight to make sure policies are followed. Consider new approaches such as a free language line that provides interpretation any time.
- Providing reliable transportation that is on time and accessible. People should also be able to use transportation services in their own language.
- Creating peer support programs for refugees with disabilities and their families.
- Improving primary and secondary schools' ability to engage with refugee families. This can be done by:
 - Facilitating appropriate testing and support for students
 - Training disability-focused refugee case managers who have knowledge of the specialized disability systems.
- Employing a "Developmental Disability Navigator" to provide ongoing advocacy.
- Identifying and educating 'gatekeepers' to connect refugee communities with disability services. Gatekeepers may be language interpreters, health care providers, or other community leaders.
- Timely and linguistically appropriate diagnosis and assessment for refugees with disabilities.
- Providing education to refugee families about the expectations for selfadvocacy in the U.S., including the focus on individual rights within the disability service systems.

Researchers suggest that these broad recommendations should be put into practice with many agencies, providers, and organizations working together while considering service availability, accessibility, and quality.

QUESTIONS?

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