

# Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations in Food Access

Overcoming Specific Barriers Facing Immigrants and Refugees



# Why is it Important to Engage Immigrants and Refugees?

- Immigrants face many challenges including unemployment, underemployment, lack of affordable and safe housing, linguistic barriers, and limited social capital. These cumulative disadvantages may make immigrants more vulnerable to food insecurity and its related health problems. There are also specific cultural, social, and economic factors that contribute to recent immigrants' household food security.
- According to the 2016 Current Population Survey (CPS), immigrants and their U.S.-born children now number approximately 84.3 million people, or 27 percent of the overall U.S. population.
- Children with foreign-born parents are overrepresented among poor families, but underrepresented in public benefits enrollment.

# Definitions

- **Immigrant**-a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country
- **Asylum seeker**-a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.
- **Undocumented immigrant**-a foreign born individual who doesn't have legal permission to stay in the U.S.A. Estimates put the number of undocumented immigrants between 11.1 to 11.4 million
- **Refugee**-an individual that is fleeing their home country in order to escape excessive danger or persecution

# Intersectionality

Racial vs. Ethnic

Race- is your biologically engineered features. It can include skin color, skin tone, eye and hair color, as well as a tendency toward developing certain diseases. It is not something that can be changed or disguised. Race does not have customs or globally learned behavior

Ethnicity-is about the learned cultural behaviors celebrated throughout regions around the world.

Hispanic/Latino

Asian

Slavic/Russian speaking

Black/African American/African/Afro-Latino

# BARRIERS TO ACCESS

- LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
- In 2013, approximately 61.6 million individuals, foreign and U.S. born, spoke a language other than English at home. While the majority of these individuals also spoke English with native fluency or very well, about 41 percent (25.1 million) were considered Limited English Proficient (LEP)
- Depending on country of origin and education level, some may be able to speak their language, but not read or write it. In this case, translating materials becomes irrelevant
- Without effective communication, it's impossible to articulate needs and the quality of services received will suffer

# TRAUMA

- Refugee and Immigrant families are often fleeing conflict, persecution, or natural disasters from their home countries
- They have often experienced extremely stressful events through the process of displacement and resettlement
- Before being forced to flee, refugees may experience imprisonment, torture, loss of property, malnutrition, physical assault, extreme fear, rape and loss of livelihood. The flight process can last days or years. During flight, refugees are frequently separated from family members, robbed, forced to inflict pain or kill, witness torture or killing, and/or lose close family members or friends and endure extremely harsh environmental conditions.
- It is difficult to even define all of the types of events they have suffered, because refugee trauma often precedes the primary war-related event that causes them to flee
- Many are suffering from PTSD
- The process of socialization and adaptation can also be stressful as they learn new cultural norms and their roles within those norms

# CULTURE SHOCK

- Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes.
- According to “Becoming Intercultural” author Young Yun Kim, “The process of crossing cultures challenges the very basis of who we are as cultural beings.”
- Many cultures hold to values, social expectations and methods of interpersonal interaction fundamentally different than those considered “normal” in the United States. These types of value differences make it difficult for immigrants and refugees to relate with others in American culture
- Resettlement for immigrants and especially refugees can cause significant mental and physical ailments that can become permanent if they don't receive assistance in the acclimation process

# DOCUMENTATION STATUS

- Among those who are considered undocumented, many did not enter the country illegally (snuck across the border as is represented in the media). High numbers entered the country on temporary visas or as tourists with the hope of being able to stay long-term
- Fear of deportation is a significant barrier to accessing social services, including food resources
- Those without permanent residency or citizenship don't qualify for government assistance and are most in need of additional services



# DISCRIMINATION

- Many immigrants face compounded barriers to equity in addition to race, physical features, dress, religion, limited English proficiency, accent, etc.
- In the current political climate, foreign born communities, regardless of immigration status, are under attack
- Immigrants and refugees often confront blazing misconceptions of their homelands and cultures. These cultural misunderstandings can make the transition to American life overwhelming

# SHIFT IN FAMILY HEIRARCHY

- Children typically adapt and acculturate quicker than their parents, which may lead adults to feel diminished and disempowered from their role of respected elders
- Due to their increased knowledge of the language, children are often put in the role of interpreter and cultural broker. This creates a role reversal as children become responsible in relaying (and in some cases filtering) information for their families.
- Gender roles can also shift, leading immigrant men in particular to feel a loss of power and authority

# VARIED CONCEPTS ON THE ROLE OF FOOD IN HEALTH

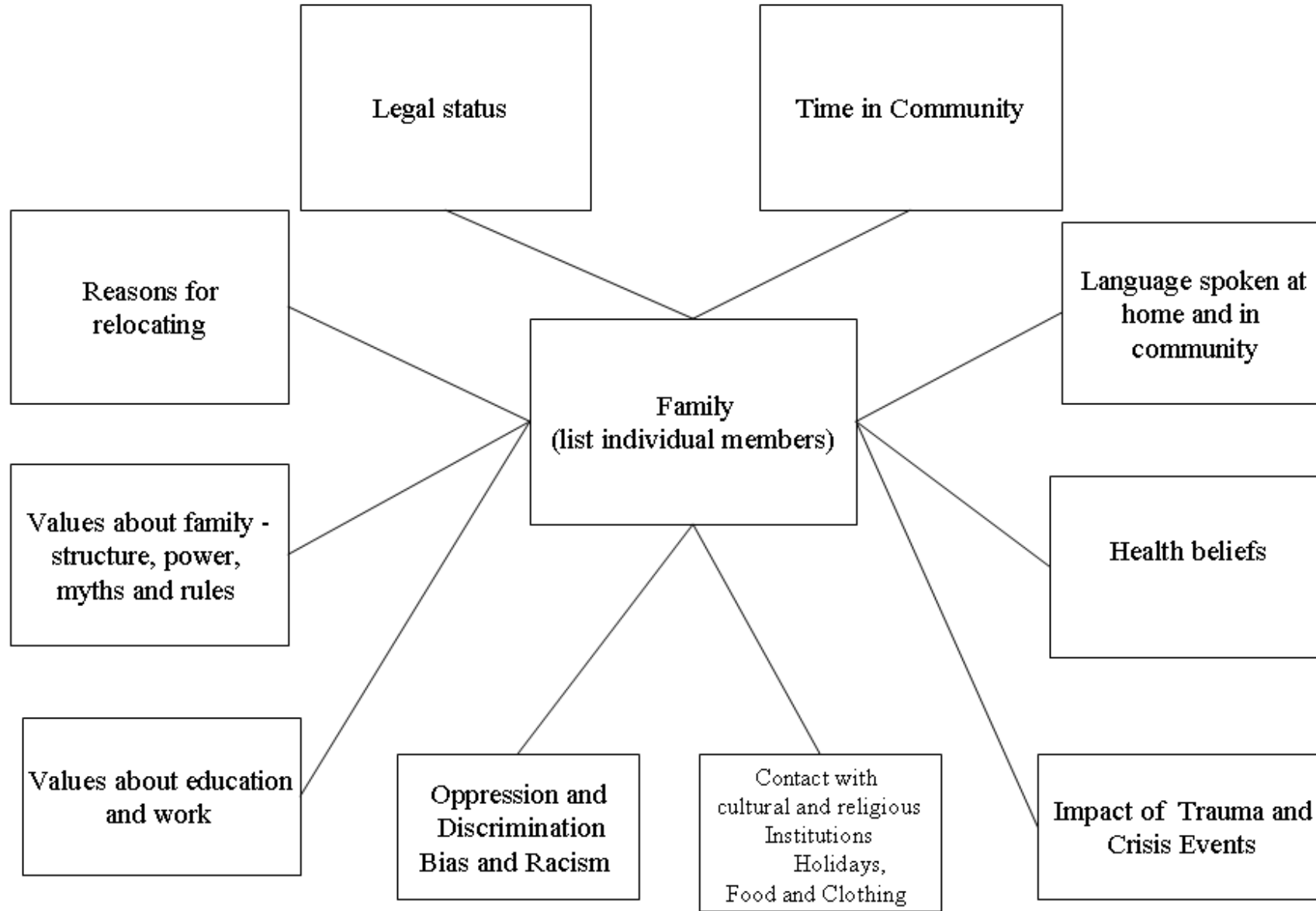
- People of diverse backgrounds have varied concepts about the meaning of nutritious and healthy food and its role in maintaining balance in the body
- Many nutrition education programs present a western-centric approach to healthy eating and meal preparation
- There can be a lack of knowledge and awareness about fundamental staples that are culturally appropriate, which can lead to misalignment between what is desired and what is offered

# MISTRUST OF PUBLIC ENTITIES

- Fear of deportation and sharing information with other agencies
- Many immigrants are bringing perceptions of public entities based on their experiences in their home countries. In areas where corruption and intimidation is widespread, there is an a pre-existing mistrust
- Complex rules for eligibility, misinformation, and unclear expectations
- Intimidation and lack of clarity around the information required to receive services

# Mapping out Solutions

CULTURAGRAM - 2007



# THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF FOOD

- Food is one of the ways in which we engage with and understand other cultures
- The food that we eat can strengthen ties to your ethnicity on a day-to-day basis and it can also reflexively reinforce a sense of identity when you are in another culture.
- Health care workers including dietitians and nutritionists may benefit from understanding why their clients are intent on eating certain foods or preparing them in a specific way, to the exclusion of other more readily available, less expensive, substitutes.

# Examples from the IRCO Hunger Relief Program

- Developed a new model of nutrition education classes for kids, inviting guest chefs from various backgrounds to teach about food culture of their home country (strengths based perspective)
- Hosted Community Celebration events to showcase culinary skills of community members, while recognizing culturally significant celebrations (March 8 International Women's Day, Cinco de Mayo, Ramadan)
- Surveyed culturally specific client groups for a list of most wanted food items
- Sharing client recipes on our social media page
- Piloting the use of telephonic interpretation at food pantries

# Cooking class with guest chef from Guinee Bissau





# CLASS ON PERUVIAN COOKING



# Getting Started

- Determine if your organization has authentic knowledge of the communities that are not being served/reached
- Create a list of community partners that can grant information and entrée into specific client groups
- Seek out cultural brokers and community experts that can give you better insight into community needs and perspectives
- Ensure your organization has culturally specific staff/volunteers to perform outreach and engagement activities

# Next Steps-Identifying Audience and Potential Partners

- Targeting specific communities or cultural groups for community engagement activities (as determined by previous analysis)
- Identify community or culturally based preferences and potential areas of growth in consultation with community partners
- Develop collaborative partnerships with culturally specific agencies to help build relationships within immigrant/refugee communities

# Ethnographic Outreach Methods/Tools and Action Plan

- Research and reading, particularly community bulletins and newspapers, which can provide valuable information
- Radio-many communities have ethnic specific radio stations
- Print Media
- Participant Observer-enters the community and attends cultural events with the purpose experiencing and learning cultural attitudes/practices
- Community or Cultural Informant-a trusted and respected guide who can describe aspects of community from their own experience
- Interviewing/Focus Groups
- Family Involvement Activities
- Plan for translation/interpretation

# Conclusion

- Being aware of the experiences and barriers faced by the immigrant community and acknowledging them can inform the type of service provided
- Research, maximizing community partners, and culturally specific outreach will lead to a more inclusive model for food access
- Linking families, professionals, and community experts helps develop and promote a system of services that is community based, accessible, comprehensive, and culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Engaging community liaisons and cultural brokers ensures authentic relationships in the growth and development of your program