

Strategies to Increase Community Participation for Unaccompanied Children

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May 5, 2021



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INCLUSIVE AND ACCEPTING OF DIVERSE CULTURES, GENDERS, PERSPECTIVES, AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THEIR OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH OUR ACTIONS, POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS



Adapted from: https://mhccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019vLrL_20190809-Web.pdf

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At the time of this presentation, Tom Coderre served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at SAMHSA. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the speakers, and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.

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Introductions: Dr. Kerri Evans



- MSW: University of Maryland School of Social Work
- In-home case management for UC released from shelter
- Cross-border social work to ensure permanency of immigrant children in domestic foster care in NJ
- Placement coordination and agency capacity development for Post Release and Foster Care services for UC serving programs
- Program Management (Quality Assurance, Training, Grant Writing, Technical Assistance, etc.) for Long Term and Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Foster Care Programs
- PhD: Boston College School of Social Work

Introductions: Dr. Kerri Evans

Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
University of Maryland, Baltimore County



Current Research:

- Unaccompanied immigrant and refugee children
- Immigrant families
- In partnership with social service providers, answering questions that allow us to
 - Improve service delivery,
 - Advocate for policy change, and/or
 - Provide preliminary analyses to increase grant funding

Current Teaching:

- Social Welfare Policy
- Field Education Seminar

Introductions: Audience

Please introduce yourself in the chat!

- Name
- Agency/role
- State where you live/practice



Objectives

- Understand barriers to community participation, school enrollment, and school well-being
- **Discuss strategies** for improving barriers to community participation, school enrollment, and school well-being for immigrant children
- **Learn best practices** in creating welcoming schools for immigrant children



Who are unaccompanied children?



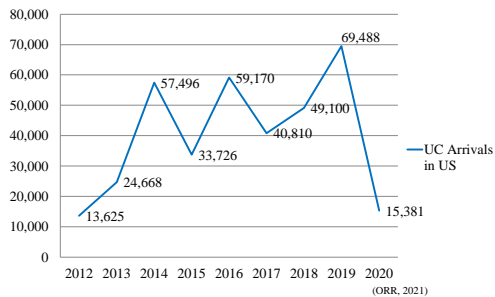
Unaccompanied children in the United States: Defining Terms

Unaccompanied Alien Child: is one who has no lawful immigration status in the United States; has not attained 18 years of age, and with respect to whom; 1) there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States; or 2) no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to provide care and physical custody.”

(Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR], 2019)

Instead, let's use: Unaccompanied Children (UC)



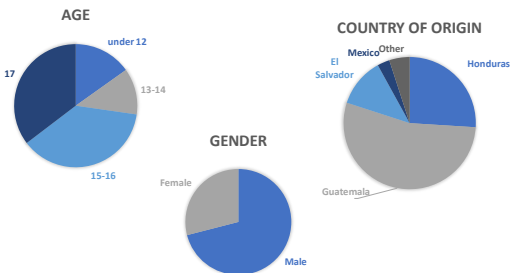


Migration Routes

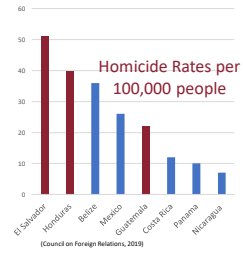


(UNICEF, 2018) 12

UC Demographics



Multiple Traumas and Human Rights Violations



Today, we are talking about adaptation to life and communities in the US





Barriers to community participation & Strategies for improving community involvement



Common means of engagement

- School
- Sports- soccer, gym membership, swimming
- Boys and girls clubs; after school programs
- Tutoring programs; ESL classes
- Mentoring programs
- Employment
- Art
- Church
- Volunteer efforts
- Babysitting
- Social interactions with neighbors

Despite the widespread fear and discrimination these kids face...
UC engage in their communities just like US-born kids do!



(Crea et al., 2018; Evans et al., under review; Socha et al., 2016)

Common Challenges Adjusting to the US

- Immigration process
- Family separation and reunification
- New caregiver; home
- Educational Expectations
- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Trauma (journey; home; & in US)
- Survivors guilt
- Debt
- Limited Resources
- Fear in community
- Possibility of deportation



Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in the United States: Macro Level Barriers To Adjustment

Kerri Evans, PhD, LCSW, University of Maryland Baltimore County
Samantha Teixeira, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work
Thomas M. Crea, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work
Virginia Fitchett, PhD, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service



Systems and community level barriers to adjustment for unaccompanied children

Barrier	# Comments
Barriers to community participation	103
Community Fear	
Lack of Legal Status	
Economic Struggles	
Lack of Insurance	
Lack of Community Preparation for English Language Learners	48
Lack of Training	33
UN-Welcoming Communities	30

(Evans et al., in prep)



Barriers to Community Participation

“Raids are happening, that affects potential reunifications, and increases fear”

“Even something like playing soccer, they can't play soccer without legal status because of league regulations.”



(Evans et al., in prep)

Language Barriers

A caseworker noted:

"A lot of kids are being seen by specialists that don't speak Spanish" because "we don't know of any bilingual psychiatrists, or psych assessments. There are huge waiting list and we need interpreters. It's the highest need."

(Evans et al., in prep)



Welcoming Communities and Macro Level Facilitators of Adjustment For Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in the United States

Kerri Evans, PhD, LCSW, University of Maryland Baltimore County
Thomas M. Crea, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work
Robert G. Hasson III, PhD, LICSW, Providence College
Samantha Teixeira, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work
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(Evans et al., under review)



Community Relationships

"[Unaccompanied children have] no established roots, our kids don't have any type of connection with anyone – that's a big difference [from US born youth] for sure. I talk to my staff, and say every kid needs six adults that are absolutely crazy about them"

(Evans et al., under review)



Inter-agency Collaboration

A foster parent commented:

"[I] definitely feel part of a multidisciplinary team – healthcare, housing, counseling, [there is] always someone I can call"

(Evans et al., under review)



Access to Healthcare

"Sexual education groups have to be tailored differently – they've never been given education, we try to do it with outside agencies but we have to be present and ease into it much more easily. [We address questions like] what is a STD and birth control? Even a girl with a baby doesn't know what a STD is – sometimes it's mind-blowing, but we really have to fill in the blanks where they didn't get certain psychoeducational topics before"



Implications & Recommendations

- Advocate for welcoming communities
 - <https://welcomingamerica.org/initiatives/certified-welcoming>
- Decrease the fear of participation
 - Spread trust and empathy- By stander trainings
- Establish partnerships that will lead to success with long term goals
 - Paid internships for UC
 - Access to trade schools and certificate programs for UC
 - Informational nights on college application process; tours of local colleges; explain majors and career options



Implications & Recommendations: Inter-agency Collaboration

Collaborate and communicate across service providers

- Proactively – network on a regular basis
 - Schools, mental health providers, legal providers, health clinics, PRS providers, religious institutions, immigrant rights advocacy organization and ...?
- Promote a continuity of care
- Co-host events
- Share resources
- Identify gaps in the community– and meet them!



Implications & Recommendations: Making GOOD Referrals

- Identify agencies with language and cultural knowledge
 - When not available in your community, advocate for training and resources to build the capacity of organizations
- Screen agencies for availability
- Consider transportation, ability to bring children, and hours of operation
- Go with client to make introductions
- Follow-up with clients, how was their experience? Use this in determining future referrals



School well-being

- Why Focus on school well-being?
- Barriers to school enrollment and school well-being
- Strategies for easing school enrollment and school well-being

Significance

- Education is a basic human right (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)
- Globally, there are 617 million children who lack basic literacy and mathematics skills (United Nations, n.d.)
- Only 1% of refugee children eventually attend college (UNHCR, 2019)
- 1 in 4 kids in US schools are part of an immigrant family (Annie E Case Foundation, 2017)



Educational System in Home Country

- Varies widely
- May be only half day school; certain months
- Many only attend primary school
 - Fees, uniforms, books are not provided
- Work/family obligations that prevent attendance
 - Possible lack of truancy officer/educational neglect mechanism
- Teachers may not have formal education
- Many schools allow corporal punishment



Guatemalan Highlands

- K'iche' speaking
- Limited books in K'iche' and Spanish in most homes
- Long & dangerous walks to school
- High teacher absences



Photos courtesy of Dr. Thomas Crea



Importance of School Connections for immigrants in US

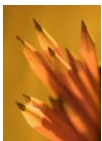
Often the only connection outside the home	Acculturation process often begins at school	School is a 'safe space' for many
Peer support	Return to normalcy	Desire to learn and advance in life (both child and parent)

(Birman et al., 2007; Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2015)



Mandatory School Attendance

- Plyler v. Doe (1982) affirmed that local school districts could not deny children enrollment in public schools due to their immigration status



- School districts **may not discourage** enrolment or attendance
- School districts may not **ask** about parent or child's **citizenship or immigration status** to establish residency within the district



(U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA))

Call to Schedule an Appointment;
COVID= web based enrollment in
English



<https://www.ny.gov/office-of-community-empowerment>

Register at the Office



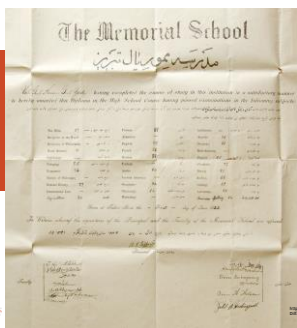
<https://www.ny.gov/office-of-community-empowerment>

Parent or Guardian must
Accompany child



<https://www.ny.gov/office-of-community-empowerment>

Official Transcripts



https://www.lhmyc.org/what-we-do/our-services/education/academic-records-services/official-transcripts

Proof of Residency



Birth Certificates



Health Records



<https://www.pitt.edu/~pittnews/2019/05/05/health-records-2019-05-05/>

Funding Implications of Student Success Rates



<https://www.pitt.edu/~pittnews/2019/05/05/health-records-2019-05-05/>

Strategies for Facilitating Enrollment

- Utilize Alternative Documents
 - Hospital or physician's note, adoption record, baptismal records, previously verified school documents, or an affidavit from a parent
 - ORR shelter documents
 - Consulate *may* be able to obtain birth certificate or prior school records
- Language
 - Provide information in native language – or secondarily, a language they speak fluently
 - Title VI of Civil Rights Act; Executive Order 13166; 1970 Memo
 - Advocate for bilingual staff in main office & guidance office



(Evans, Perez-Aponte, & McRoy, 2019; (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

Strategies for Facilitating Enrollment: McKinney Vento Act

- The McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987
 - Law that provides federal money for homeless shelter programs

Educational Implications:

- McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001 Part C:
 - Homeless youth have equal access to free education
 - If state has residency requirements for school, they must revise or create alternative regulations to ensure Homeless youth have equal access to free education

(U.S. Department of Education, 2004)



Macro level strategies

- Advocate for fair enrollment practices
- Advocate for Centralized Enrollment Centers
- Train staff members
 - Incl. Enrollment Center or front office



Support Strategies: Educational Challenges and Promising Practices for Unaccompanied Immigrant Students in US schools

Kerri Evans, PhD, University of Maryland Baltimore County
 Robert G. Hasson III, PhD, Providence College
 Thomas Crea, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work
 Sarah Neville, Boston College School of Social Work
 Gabrielle Oliveira, Boston College Lynch School of Education



Challenges unaccompanied children navigate in the US educational system

Table 1. Challenges Faced in the School System

Challenge	# Comments
Language challenges in school	38
Low capacity of school district to serve UCs	38
UCs' lack of school preparedness	28
Cultural clash	19
UCs' health/Mental Health challenges	14



(Evans et al., under review)

Low capacity of the US system to adequately serve UC

Teachers said:

"[We are] missing a partnership with a trade school"

"A kid is mislabeled with ADHD – in reality he's been working on a farm since we was six. They try to teach him at age level, but they need to teach him at a 5-year-old level. Kids like him end up with an outstanding number of suspensions, it's hard for schools, they're just tired of him"



(Evans et al., under review)

Cultural clash

"Kids don't know what it means to be in school. The expectations in different countries are not the same, [and this] affects behavior and study skills"

"Parents often hesitate coming to the school in general because of lack of language, they think it's a negative connotation to walk into the building because something must be wrong."



(Evans et al., under review)

Other Edu Challenges

- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Cost of supplies
- Potential lack of trust in adults, teachers, those with authority
- Balancing work v. school pressures from family

Challenges for the Caregiver

- Work and family obligations
- Navigating a new community
- Understanding educational norms: incl. testing, applications, requirements
- Physical and emotional needs for oneself, and child

(Chiu, Pong, Mori & Chow, 2012; Markham, 2012; Maynard et al., 2016; Socha, Mullooly & Jackson, 2016)



Current **strategies** being implemented in schools to **assist** unaccompanied children

Table 2. Support Strategies in Place for Unaccompanied Children

Strategy	# Comments
Academic support strategies	44
Tutoring	
Access Individual Learning Plans and Special Education Services	
ESL Services	
Educational Advocates	
Interdisciplinary team of supports in the educational system	28
Emotional and behavioral support strategies	22

(Evans et al., under review)



Academic Support Strategies

A community agency staff member said:

"We do tutoring four nights a week. They want to learn – but schools are hindered with how much they can do."

"Taking them to the college campus to meet with mentor there and exposing them to higher education. In several cases it changed the goals for certain kids who were in high school and weren't considering college."

(Evans et al., under review)



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Interdisciplinary team of supports in public schools

Teacher commented:

“It’s important for students to see there’s collaboration among all of us... it would be great to have agencies come for after school – it makes it a more cohesive learning experience if it’s on site.”

(Evans et al., under review)



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Implications and Recommendations



- Critically assess
 - Needs of their immigrant students
 - Current services available to them
 - Gaps
- Conduct program evaluations on various **school-based interventions** to assess outcomes before expanding services
- Create policies around **grade placement** best practices for UC students with large educational gaps

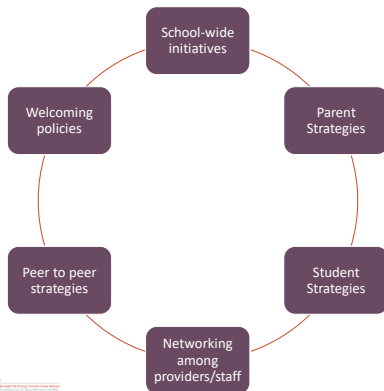
(Evans et al., under review)



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Establishing Welcoming Schools





School-wide practices



- Ensure bullying prevention programs are culturally responsive
- Establish school adjustment programs and newcomer groups
- Increase tutoring availability
- Hire bilingual and bicultural staff
- Bystander trainings for staff (teachers, counselors, bus drivers, crossing guards, cleaning staff,) students, and parents of all backgrounds
- Multilingual signs & Diverse decorations
- Advocate for Trauma Informed Schools
 - Trauma Toolkit for Educators: <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/trauma-toolkit>



(BRYCS, 2017; Evans, Perez-Aponte & McRoy, 2019; Evans, Diebold & Calvo, 2018.)

Trauma Informed Practices

- Lower the volume of the bell
- Let the new student observe the chaos of class transition first
- Create a quiet space to relax and self-regulate
 - Applaud students for using this resource
 - Do not set limits or consequences
- Conduct home visits, meet the family where they are-- build trust
- Use a trauma informed lens when conducting assessments, and asking questions of the student or parent
- Attend other webinars that address this topic more in-depth!



Welcome Parents/Caregivers

- Welcome caregivers who are not bio parent
- Explain expectations for caregiver engagement
- Invite caregivers to tour the school
- Provide orientation to instructional programs
- Host open house and parent nights
- Utilize (or advocate for) parent liaisons
- Help facilitate social support networks



Support Services for Students

- Orientation to the school
- Extended learning time
- Proper assessment
 - Refer for Individualized Education Plans (IEP) *when needed*
- Mental health supports
- Use classroom curriculums that celebrate diversity



(Evans & Reynolds, under review; DOE, 2015)



Networking among providers/staff in the schools

- Before a new student starts, have a meeting to discuss the plan for welcome
- District wide committee for all the people who serve as "point person" for immigrant students
- Who to include??
 - Classroom teachers, ESL teachers, guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists, special education professionals, family liaisons, nurses, principal and assistant principal, physical therapists, or occupational therapists, etc.



Networking among providers/staff in the community

- Make referrals to the community for student, caregiver & family:
 - Financial capability, Health, mental health, housing, employment, and basic needs, ESL, GED classes
- Develop partnerships with immigrant serving organization that can help students and teachers become more knowledgeable



Peer to Peer Strategies

- Build a social support network
- Lunch clubs
- Peer mentoring programs
- Extracurricular activities – sports, language clubs, volunteer opportunities, leadership opportunities



Welcoming policies and practices

- Work alongside existing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
- Bilingual staff: main office & guidance office
- PROACTIVELY Translate forms and resources
- Centralized Enrollment Offices
- Policies for Grade Placement
- Culturally sensitive academic testing measures
- Explain laws and expectations to the family: substance use, mandatory attendance, supervision, child abuse, etc. to help mitigate future issues





Thanks for being here today!



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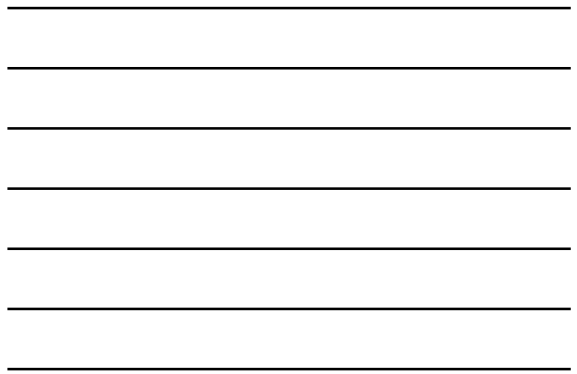
Hispanic Indigenous Population Products



Guatemalan Maya Families



Mexican Indigenous Families



Hispanic Indigenous Population Products



Northern Triangle Indigenous Populations



Ecuadorians, Peruvians, and Nicaraguan Indigenous Populations



Coming Up Next



Robert G. Hasson III, Ph.D., LICSW



Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo, Ph.D

Mental Health Assessments for Unaccompanied Minors in the US

May 12th, 2021
1:00 pm Eastern

Evidence-Based Trauma-Focused Interventions for Unaccompanied Minors

May 19, 2021
1:00 pm Eastern



Type your questions in the Question Log



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Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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