

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL GOALS IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the educational and occupational goals of youth in Sunnyvale Neighborhood Center's after school program to better inform future programming. Sunnyvale Neighborhood Center is a refugee and immigrant community center sponsored by the Asian Association of Utah. Twenty-two adolescents from 18 countries, primarily in Africa, participated. Average time in the US was 5 years. This research was conducted at Sunnyvale because there is a large number of elementary- and middle-school-aged children participating in the center. Not only will the data help the adolescents in the program now, it will also help the younger children when they become older. Furthermore, the refugee and immigrant population is growing quickly in the Salt Lake Valley, and there is a lack of research on educational and occupational goals for youth in these populations.

Interviews and focus groups were the main methods used. These were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Themes were coded using qualitative techniques. Common educational and occupational goals for participants were: obtaining a bachelor degree, providing financially for their family in the U.S. and their country of origin, and improving the quality of life in their country of origin. Many of the careers the adolescents hoped to have were in the service sector including health care, police enforcement and education. Identified barriers to reaching these goals included language barriers, grades, disengagement, economic status, and discrimination. The participants perceived that family and community support, speaking multiple languages and community resources would help them achieve their goals.

The participants also suggested programming that Sunnyvale could implement to help them reach their goals. Their recommendations included: creating a mentorship and job shadowing program where adolescents can connect to professionals in fields of interest, arranging visits to colleges around the state, having representatives from a variety of fields talk to participants, providing one-on-one help with college and job applications and financial aid, and recruiting more volunteers and staff to help with homework.

