



Follow the Leader: *Supporting Refugee Efforts to Self-Organize*

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AND PANELISTS

Why this panel?

- ▶ I have become more and more curious about the efforts, needs, skills and leadership of Next Generation “refugees”
- ▶ Thinking more about how I might support rather than lead – repositioning myself
- ▶ Creating contexts where refugees or affected communities speak for themselves

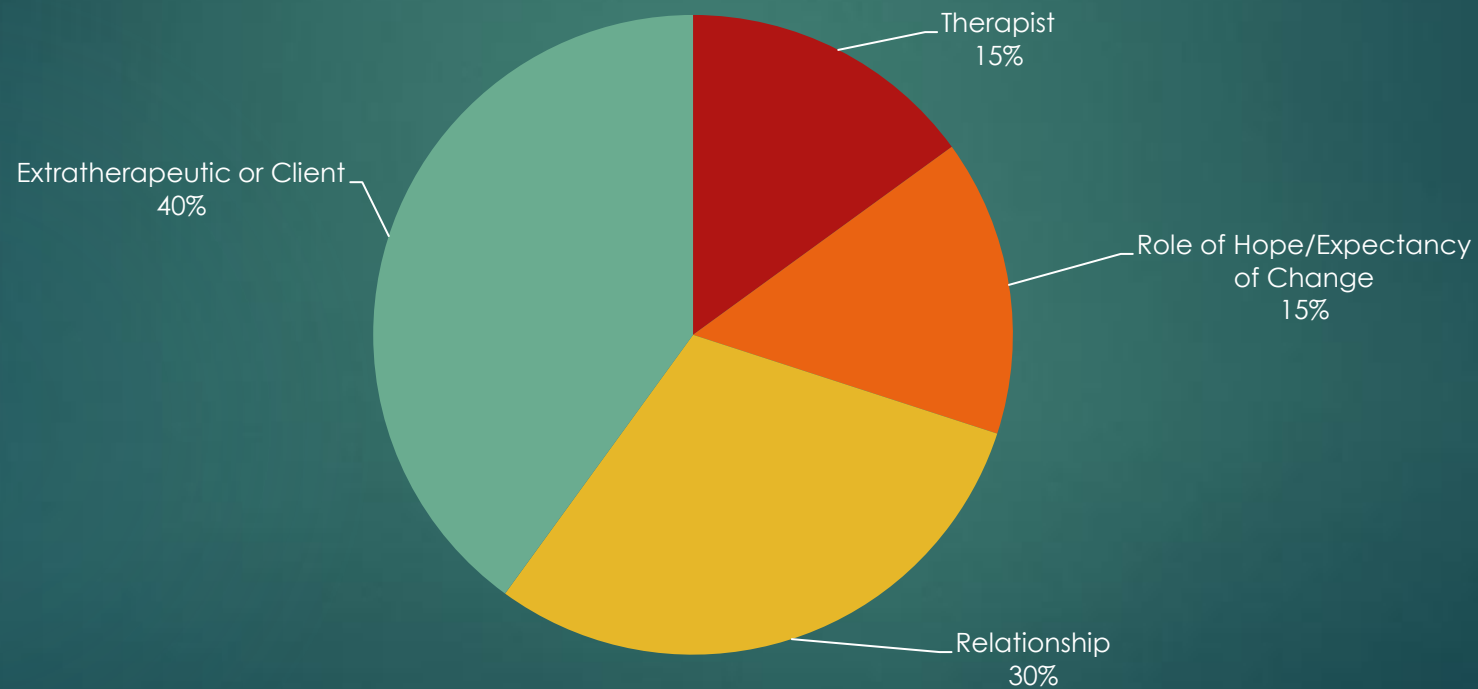
A Few Assumptions...

- ▶ Refugees are never passive recipients of their situation(s). They are always responding in ways that we may notice and ways that we may not recognize
- ▶ Some of these initiatives are collective. Some are individual.
- ▶ Refugees have skills and knowledges about ways of being in the world, surviving hardship, healing and organizing that they employ in their everyday lives. Many of these are not recognized, validated or acknowledged by the wider culture.
- ▶ Professional “helpers” have a role but it is the refugees themselves who insure their own (and their cultural) survival and “thrival”

What works in Therapy?

From Barry Duncan and Scott Miller's The Heart and Soul of Change (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Healing Factors in Therapy



Listening to the Stories....

Efforts that next generation refugees (in their 20's and 30's) are making to improve the overall health and strength of their communities by addressing issues that their communities face.

A few thoughts

- ▶ **Activity-based programs (like soccer, for example) are not just about “play”.** In some cases these programs – especially for young people in their late teens and early 20’s – have made the difference between a life on the streets and staying connected to positive endeavors. But a sports program, by itself, is not enough. It requires outreach, opportunities for leadership development and 1:1 connection to be most effective.
- ▶ **Be patient with Next Gen initiatives.** Sometimes they are choppy and the leaders are not always trained to do what they are trying to do. Stay with them for a while, ask what is needed, support where possible, coach when you can (without taking over).
- ▶ **Next Gen leaders are often balancing many responsibilities.** Asking them to volunteer for more programs/boards/initiatives can easily overwhelm them. Many are in school, working, raising their own families and oftentimes trying to “raise” younger brothers and sisters. Just being mindful of this might help us to adjust our expectations, pay them stipends for their time and/or create other incentives to have them participate.
- ▶ **Some of the Next Gen leaders are acutely aware of the problems and possibilities faced by their communities – because they are experiencing them themselves.** Being educated, well versed in English and acculturated does not grant immunity from some of the same struggles that other refugees face.

And a few more....

- ▶ **Many Next Gen leaders are not always aware of what else is happening in the community and/or elsewhere.** Part of our work can be connecting leaders to each other or to other geographic regions in order to build capacity. Creating opportunities for cross-cultural conversations (between and among Next Gen refugee leaders) can be a powerful intervention to help them strengthen their own connections and efforts.
- ▶ **Sometimes the best support we can offer is to help Next Gen leaders fund their own education.** Creating scholarship programs could be a big help to some who are pursuing an associates, bachelors or masters degree. Also creating internship opportunities that help Next Gen leaders gain valuable experience (and perhaps develop some of what they are trying to do) can be of great assistance as well.
- ▶ **Even though someone is in their 20's or 30's and can speak their native language, they may not know how to read and/or write** that language and may benefit from initiatives that help them learn to read or write. **Similarly, cultural programs that address religious and/or cultural heritage and traditions may be necessary for Next Gen leaders** who may not have received a lot of the "informal" education about culture due to dislocation, living in the camps or coming to the US very early in their lives.

What does this get you thinking about?

What questions does it raise?

What challenges or opportunities does it present?

What possibilities does it spark?

What other initiatives does it get you thinking about?

What is one action in your context/setting that you might take?