USU Extension Experts Work to Understand Refugee Needs

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In order to increase community support for refugees, Utah State University Extension faculty and students conducted a research project last year that examined the needs of the refugee population in Utah.

A team of researchers led by Steve Daniels, USU Extension community development specialist, and Lorien Belton, Utah’s Community-Based Conservation Program coordinator, interviewed refugees as well as employers and service providers who worked closely with refugees.

Refugees are people who have been forced to flee their home country because of violence or fear of persecution. One of the main findings of the needs assessment report was that refugees find it difficult to meet their basic needs and wants due to a lack of understanding of systems such as transportation, health care and education.

“We have complicated systems in the United States, and being a fully functional adult means you have to know how to navigate those systems,” Belton said.

The report then went on to provide numerous recommendations to improve the Utah experience for refugees, such as increasing access to translators and providing financial literacy education.

Belton said this information could be useful to a variety of professionals, such as lawyers or medical personnel, interested in knowing how to connect with and assist the refugees in Utah.

One section of the report provided insight into the opportunities for employers interested in hiring refugees. Belton said many people are unaware that refugees are completely legal to work in the United States.

The report concluded with quotes from refugees about their dreams for their families ten years into the future.

“They hope for education, someday buying a home and supporting their families highlights how similar their desires are to the wishes of all Utahns,” Belton said.

The research was funded by the Utah Department of Workforce Services. The report can be found at the website of Logan’s recently formed refugee support organization, Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection, at http://www.cacherefugees.org/refugee-needs.html.

Photo: High school students from refugee backgrounds learn about STEM career opportunities at the annual Refugee Youth Conference, held at Salt Lake Community College last fall.

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