

Asylee Women Enterprise

Interview #2

Interviewee: Tiffany Nelms, Executive Director of Asylee Women Enterprise

Researchers: Iman AbdoulKarim & Fatima Bamba

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Time Stamps:

00:01:20 Community Building; mental health and well being

00:4:00 Celebrating and finding joy; finding community

00:07:56 Community building; survival and tools from previous experiences

00:10:50 Honoring the dead; healing and mourning; survival and tools from previous experiences

00:13:48 Mental health and wellness; survival and tools from previous experiences; community

00:20:21 Government response to coronavirus

00:23:47: Assessment of relief work; government response to coronavirus

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00:01:20 Community Building; mental health and well being

- A part of the community AWE provides to members is a community of childcare, which means moments of respite for members who are mothers
- Conditions of coronavirus and social distancing exacerbates trauma, because a part of overcoming members' PTSD, anxiety and depression is being in a supportive community. There is a sense of loss for this human connection with social distancing and online programing

00:4:00 Celebrating and finding joy; finding community

- During their day program and During Ramadan, they provide a space for fasting members outside of the dining room. This additional space creates a space for conversation about Ramadan, culture of Iftar, and community learning between members. Occasionally women come from countries where religious groups, including those they are a part of, are in conflict among other things. So, the kitchen, dining area, and the fasting space creates a neutral space and a safe space for conversation. Other members may be fleeing their home countries because of their gender identities or sexual orientation, which can be a moment of conflict between members because of religious beliefs on gender and sexuality. AWE works to not recreate that sense of persecution for members during moments of cultural exchange. AWE works to create a space for conversation where everyone can discuss how they feel, and they monitor conversations closely. Above all, AWE must be a safe space.

00:07:56 Community building; survival and tools from previous experiences

- The mental health organization they partner with, Intercultural Counseling Connection (ICC), also helps support AWE. They are one aspect / piece of the community. So, when moments of conflict happen, allowing others in the community, including ICC, to facilitate conversations. AWE staff try to not take on the role of leader or authority during dialogue between members. They try to create a space for dialogue before that happens.
- They have had trans members, and they ask members if there is anything they want to share and try to facilitate conversation in a positive way before something happens.

00:10:50 Honoring the dead; healing and mourning; survival and tools from previous experiences

- Members come from countries at war, and have had intense personal loss. So, the loss they experience back home is complicated by being away from your family and knowing there is no justice for persecuted family members. Members have survivors guilt. The ICC does a weekly counseling group. This creates mutual support of women understanding what it means to experience loss, and the support AWE provides. It is a long process. For example, they have survivors from the Rwandan genocide, and 20 years later it is still impacting the survivors.

00:13:48 Mental health and wellness; survival and tools from previous experiences; community

- Members come from countries where they have not had access to adequate medical care. There are feelings of helplessness because people are scared for their families. Coronavirus has been triggering, because they come from a country where there are lockdowns and they cannot leave their houses. And to have Coronavirus come and create similar guidelines, it is triggering to their previous experiences.

00:16:37 Celebrating and finding joy

- Members are continuing to have moments of joy, and working with members to not feel guilty about moments of joy because of survivor's guilt and being in the U.S.

00:17:40 Assessment of relief work; community building

- AWE resources - they also partner with Intercultural Community Connection for counseling and mental health resources; medical groups that serve the homeless; create job readiness programs; facilitate cultural orientations; and have therapeutic garden and a vegetable garden. During normal times, they do outings, like the end of summer picnics at the beach. Healing comes in many forms, so they offer different kinds of spaces for members to heal. For some, it is planting vegetables they are familiar with from their country, this can be just as therapeutic as counseling for some.

00:20:21 Government response to coronavirus

- Coronavirus resources are dependent on immigration status. The government tells asylum seekers / members they can be in the U.S., but must wait for years to get visas, and in the meantime, they cannot work, are not eligible for cash assistance, food stamps, unemployment, etc. AWE had higher expectations for government support considering coronavirus since the virus disproportionality impacts immigrant communities, in urban areas, relying on public transportation, etc. Members and asylum seekers have been left out of these government programs.

00:23:47: Assessment of relief work; government response to coronavirus

- New issue arising with seekers not being able to apply for work permits with changes to USPS. Now UPS wont ship to post office boxes, where members applications for work permits are submitted. So, you have seekers who trying to do the right thing by applying on time for their permits and sending in all their documentation, but the applications won't be received in time because of USPS changes. And now seekers will lose out on this opportunity to work, likely for 2 years, and will face homelessness because of not being able to work.