

Topic: Housing

Activity: Housing Expectations: A Critical Incident for Refugees

Objective

- ✓ Participants will consider both their expectations and the realities of the housing they are likely to receive in the United States
- ✓ Participants will identify some ways to address challenges and frustrations

Lesson Time

30 minutes

Materials

- Critical incident, one copy per participant (included)
- Flipchart paper with reflection questions listed (samples included)
- Markers
- Tape

Introduction

Refugee resettlement case workers often struggle to find housing for newcomers in the United States. In finding adequate housing, they consider many factors such as cost, location, safety, size, and accessibility. Many landlords are nervous to rent apartments to tenants without American credit or job history. In addition, caseworkers must find furniture and household goods, which are typically inexpensive or donated. However, some participants have high expectations of their housing in the United States, only to be disappointed and frustrated with the reality.

Practice

(Note: Feel free to change names to reflect your participants.)

1. Put participants into small groups of 2-4 and ask each group to choose a spokesperson.
2. Distribute "Housing Expectations: A Critical Incident for Refugees."
3. Ask groups to read the critical incident (or read it aloud if literacy is a challenge). Participants discuss the reflection questions.
4. Bring the large group together and ask the spokesperson from each group to summarize the main ideas from their group discussion. Write answers to the discussion questions on the flipchart paper and discuss as necessary.

Reflection Questions

- What happened in this critical incident?
- Did Rihab make the right decisions? What else could she have done?
- What might happen if you continue to complain to your case worker?
- What are other ways Rihab could improve her living environment?

Housing Expectations: A Critical Incident for Refugees

Rihab* arrived in the United States with her two daughters. In her home country, she worked as a teacher and lived in an upper-middle class neighborhood. Although her cultural orientation instructors warned her that her initial housing in the United States might not be as good as it was in her home country, she heard the United States is a rich country and the houses are big.

When she arrives, however, her case worker takes her to a small apartment in an old building. Although the case worker tells her the neighborhood is safe, Rihab feels nervous. There are people from different races and ethnicities in her apartment building, and some of them seem poor to Rihab. Also, the furniture is used and does not match. Rihab never had used furniture before.

Stop and reflect:

- How does Rihab feel about her new apartment? Why?

Rihab feels upset with her case worker for not finding her a better home. The next day, she complains to him and asks to move and be given new furniture. The case worker tells her that the resettlement agency has limited money and helps many refugees. He says that it will be difficult for Rihab to afford a better apartment and the furniture was donated by volunteers. The case worker encourages Rihab to think of her apartment as temporary housing until she finds a job and can save money to move to a better apartment.

Stop and reflect:

- What happened?
- Do you think the case worker can find Rihab a better apartment?
- What should Rihab do now?

Rihab complains to her case worker again, hoping he will help her if she continues to complain. Instead, her case worker repeats that the resettlement agency has limited money and Rihab's apartment is the best she can afford. Rihab does not believe him, so she visits another family in her community whose apartment is newer and fancier and asks for help. They tell her that when they arrived 3 years ago, they also started in an old apartment with used furniture. The family advises her to save money and get a job first. Although Rihab is very disappointed, she now realizes that she will have to be patient. She buys some inexpensive decorations and does her best to make the apartment look nicer. She also begins to greet her neighbors, hoping to feel more comfortable in the community.

Stop and reflect:

- Did Rihab make the right decisions? What else could she have done?
- What might happen if you continue to complain to your case worker?
- What are ways Rihab could make her living environment better?