

Working With a Multicultural Community

During my time as a homework club coordinator for Human Solutions, I served as a site coordinator for multiple communities. I worked with students at many of the apartment complex communities that housed families served by Human Solutions. Most families lived on lower incomes and many came at immigrants or refugees from various countries including Somalia, Russia, and Mexico. With one particular community I worked with primarily Somalian and Russian students and families. Historically there had been a disconnection between the two cultural groups living in this community. If not in outright arguments or fights, I think there was just a general lack of understanding between the two groups which resulted in a functional yet disconnected community environment. I observed many differences between the cultural groups including differing views on parenting which affected our homework club as the discontinuity bled into the way the kids interacted with each other. Often if one group of kids was involved in an activity the other group would not participate.

One of the major differences between the cultural groups was religion. The majority of the Russian families were catholic while the Somalian families were Muslim. Part of our programming includes a monthly family night and our July family night coincided with Ramadan which most of our Somalian students and families practiced. We decided the theme of our family night was “cultural diversity” and invited both cultural communities to share their cultural practices and teach us about the significance for their culture.

We held a potluck style meal and invited all of our families to bring traditional food from their culture. We had a great turn out as most of our student’s families brought food and shared the significance of it for their culture. Our Somalian students who participated in Ramadan also had to wait until sunset to eat so they brought so they used the time to pray and teach other students there about their religion and what they do for Ramadan. The older students took on leadership roles to guide younger students through the practices and also lead in teaching other students about what they were doing. Other students took interest in what they were doing and were very responsive to the sharing. They also shared their own culture with others.

We were originally unsure about how the family night would unfold and whether students and families would be responsive to it. It turned out to be a great success. It served as a multicultural learning experience for the kids and created a greater sense of understanding and cohesion in the community where students felt more connected to their peers. Students also felt a greater sense of pride in their own culture.

This was a special setting in that we could share religious beliefs whereas at a school I would be unable to host a community event with a focus on religion but I bring the multicultural night to a school would be a positive thing. I learned the power for the community and the students individually in being able to share culture and help to eliminate whatever misunderstanding of cultures might be present for some students.