



ISSUES RELATED TO SOMALIS AND SOMALI BANTU

Agencies resettling Somali Bantus (SB) are likely to hire or retain Somali caseworkers as the primary contacts for this newly resettled group. Since there is a history of enmity between these two groups, it is suggested that certain aspects be taken into consideration:

- each feels victimized by the other;
- each dehumanizes the other;
- the perceptions of Somali Bantus by Somalis may be that they are inferior to others and, thus, unable to learn as rapidly;
- the perception of Somalis by Somali Bantus may be that they are oppressive and plagued by a sense of superiority and that they look down on them and their community;
- and, more.

Deeply held beliefs are difficult to overcome but, in this case, it is vital that it be accomplished or at least an attempt is made to accomplish the goal. The easy beginning is to explain that, in the United States, everyone has equal rights and (should be) treated equally. No one group is superior to any other group. Historical grievances should be left behind.

Having said that, it is important for each side to express their own respective grievances. This should be done in a safe setting by an accomplished and objective mediator who will take no one's side. It could begin with one or two people from each group. These people could experience a session themselves and, in time, learn to help with the mediation.

During the grievance stage, each person should be encouraged to listen carefully to the other and to acknowledge the others' points and agree, when possible. Problem-solving questions should be asked, such as: "How can we best get past these stereotypical thinking?" ("What if we were to.....?")

When each side feels comfortable the building process can begin. There is something called "BATNA" in conflict resolution terms and it refers to the "Best Alternative to Negotiations." The question can be asked as to what each party thinks will happen if the negotiations don't take place. There could be many responses but some might be:

- the SB will not want to accept help readily from Somalis;
- the Somalis may have reservations about actually going out of their way for the SB....after all, it may make them feel as though they are the "servants";
- when the SB have a crisis, they may call someone at the agency other than their case worker, thereby causing more problems between the two;
- the Somalis may never really see the potential that the SB have in their new lives, thinking that they are unlikely to be able to succeed.

It is important to build partnerships between the Bantus and other Somalis in the community so that each group can develop a better understanding of the "other" which, might ultimately lead to mutual respect and admiration. It is recommended that relationships be initially facilitated between a few people who can then play a leadership role in establishing partnerships between the larger communities..

Source:

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