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## Centerstone offers classes to help refugees cope with changes

Classes range from parenting to managing stress to budgeting money

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**RANSOM PLACE** — From job stress to parenting to making sure their children are doing well in school, refugees face a host of challenges when they come to the U.S. to build a better life.

Language barriers and lack of a social network for support can make living in a new country even more difficult.

This is why Centerstone, a mental health services provider with offices just off Murfreesboro Road, is trying to make the transition for refugees easier.

With the help of a federal Mental Health Access for Refugees and Immigrants grant from the Office of Minority Health, Centerstone has been offering classes for area refugees for about five years. Most of the refugees are from Sudan or Somalia, but some have come from Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Egypt.

The center partners with the Somali Community Center of Nashville, the Sudanese Community and Women's Service Center and leaders in the Central African communities.

Classes focus on subjects ranging from positive parenting and disciplining children to domestic violence and managing stress in the family to gangs and neighborhood safety. Classes also focus on budgeting and money management, as many refugees face financial hardships when they come.

"I'd say they've been going well," said Richard Sapp, outreach specialist for Centerstone.

"The attendance has dramatically increased. I think we're getting the word out about what we have to offer."

Classes have been offered at the Thompson Lane Boys & Girls Club and the CWA-Cayce Learning Center in East Nashville. As many as 70 to 80 people have been known to show up for a single class, Sapp said.

"The classes have been good in a lot of different ways," said Salaad Nur, deputy director for the Somali Community Center of Nashville. For example, he said, a Somali police officer from the San Diego Police Department came to one of the classes to speak to the refugees about safety. Also, at one of the classes in East Nashville, it was discovered how many Somalis feel insecure in that area.

"It think they are very positive," Nur said.

The purpose of the program complements Centerstone's approach to mental health, said Sapp. "Centerstone is really big into prevention. If we can strengthen family ties and the 'extended family' of their community, we can do a lot to prevent future behavioral problems in the children as well as the adults," he said.

Sapp said many refugees come here with only their immediate families, so their community becomes their "extended family."

The classes have been particularly effective at educating refugees about mental illness, Sapp said.

"They're more comfortable with the notion of mental health treatment and accepting referrals." This has helped to reduce some of the negative stereotypes associated with mental health services, Sapp said.

"But there's always more to be done," he added.